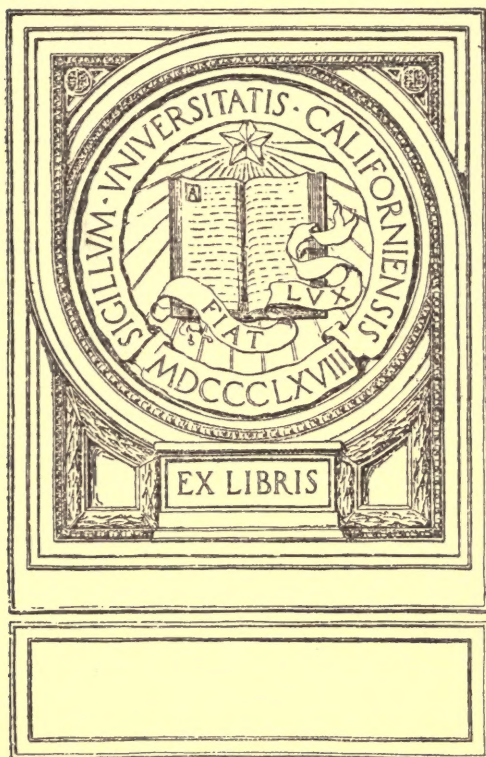




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LECTURES  
ON THE  
TRULY EMINENT  
ENGLISH POETS.

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---

BY PERCIVAL STOCKDALE.

---

---

Johnson, with admiration oft I see  
The Critick and the Bard conjoined in thee:  
But prejudices, too, as oft I find,  
Corrupt, debase, mislead thy noble mind.  
Hence, against thee, I seize the cause of truth;  
A cause that I adored, from early youth.  
Oh! may her voice inspire my latest breath!  
And soothe reflexion in the hour of death!

*Ed Io Anche son pittore.*

CORREGGIO.

---

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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## LECTURE XI.

### Y O U N G.

THE sentiments of our poet, sometimes, and particularly in his Night-Thoughts, swell to bombast. In allusion to this excess, when he was riding, one day, through a little town, with my Lord Chesterfield, his noble friend, observing that there was painted on a board, over a shop-door,—“*Fustian sold here;*”—read the inscription to Young, and asked him, “when he had changed his lodgings?”

But in these Night-Thoughts, there are many, *many* passages, compared with which, all the brilliant *bons-mots* of Stanhope are eclipsed; as the stars fade before the orient-sun. Indulge me with a permission to give you, from these poems, one or two examples of their excellence. To give you every example of their tran-



scendent excellence, would be to transcribe most of the verses which they contain.

We should reap the best effects from the following passage, if we gave it our serious, and practical attention: it would make us graver than we commonly are; yet it would make us happier. I take it from the second night.

Who venerate themselves, the world despise.  
 For what, gay friend, is this escutcheoned world,  
 Which hangs out death, in one eternal night!  
 A night that glooms us, in the noon-tide ray;  
 And wraps our thoughts, at banquets, in the shroud!  
 Life's little stage is a small eminence;  
 Inch high, the grave above; that home of man,  
 Where dwells the multitude; we gaze around;  
 We read their monuments; we sigh; and while  
 We sigh, we sink; and *are* what we deplored;  
 Lamenting, or lamented, all our lot!

Is Death at distance?—No; he has been *on* thee;  
 And given sure earnest of his final blow.  
 Those hours that lately smiled, where are they now?  
 Pallid, to thought, and ghastly; drowned; all drowned,  
 In that great depth, which nothing disembogues;  
 And dying, they bequeathed thee small renown.  
 The rest are on the wing; how fleet their flight!  
 Already has the fatal train took fire;  
 A moment,—and the world's blown up to thee!  
 The sun is darkness; and the stars are dust!

The moral pleasures, and advantages of the night, Young's favourite season, for poetry, and philosophy; and the moral *disadvantages*, from the glare, agitation, and tumult of the day; are, in these lines of the fifth night, finely imagined, and expressed:

Let Indians; and the gay, *like* Indians, fond  
Of feathered fopperies, the sun adore :  
Darkness has more divinity for *me*:  
It strikes thought inward ; it drives back the soul,  
To settle on *herself* ; our point supreme !  
There lies our theatre ; there sits our judge.  
Darkness the curtain drops o'er life's dull scene ;  
'Tis the kind hand of Providence, stretched out  
'Twixt man, and vanity ; 'tis reason's reign,  
And virtue's, too ; these tutelary shades  
Are man's asylum, from the tainted throng.  
Night is the good man's friend, and guardian, too ;  
It no less rescues virtue than inspires.

Virtue, for ever frail, as fair, below ;  
Her tender nature suffers in the croud ;  
Nor touches on the world, without a stain.  
The world's infectious : few bring back, at eve,  
Immaculate, the manners of the morn.  
Something we thought, is blotted ; we resolved,  
Is shaken ; we renounced, returns again.  
Each salutation may slide in a sin,  
Unthought before ; or fix a former flaw.  
Nor is it strange ; light ; motion ; concourse ; noise ;  
All, scatter us abroad ; thought, out-ward bound ;

Neglectful of our home-affairs, flies off;  
And leaves the breast unguarded, to the foe.

Night Vth. Vol. III. d. pages, 105, 106.

The unencumbered, excursive, and happy range of the soul, when emancipated from the body, is described in the following lines of the sixth night, with that variety, vigour, and sublimity, which peculiarly mark the poetry of Young:

Thy nature, immortality, who knows;  
And yet, who knows it not? It is but life,  
In stronger thread of brighter colour spun;  
And spun for ever; dipt, by cruel Fate,  
In Stygian dye; how black, how brittle, *here!*  
How short our correspondence with the sun!  
And, while it lasts, inglorious! Our best deeds,  
How wanting in their weight! our highest joys,  
Small cordials, to support us, in our pain,  
And give us strength to suffer.—But how great,  
To mingle interests; converse; amities,  
With all the sons of reason! scattered wide,  
Through habitable space; wherever born;  
Howe'er endowed! To live free citizens  
Of universal nature! To lay hold,  
By more than feeble faith, on the Supreme!  
To call Heaven's rich, unfathomable mines,  
(Mines, which support Archangels in their state)  
Our own! To rise in science, as in bliss;  
Initiate in the secrets of the skies!  
To read creation; read its mighty plan,  
In the bare bosom of the Deity!



The plan, and execution, to collate !  
 To see, before each glance of piercing thought,  
 All cloud ; all shadow, blown remote ; and leave  
 No mystery but that of love divine ;  
 Which lifts us on the Seraph's flaming wing,  
 From earth's *Aceldama* ; this field of blood ;  
 Of inward anguish ; and of outward ill ;  
 From darkness ; and from dust ;—to *such* a scene !  
 Love's element ! true joy's illustrious home !  
 From Earth's sad contrast (now deplored) more fair !  
 What exquisite vicissitude of fate !  
 Blest absolution of our blackest hour !

Night VIth. Vol. III. d. pages, 144, 145.

In the Consolation, or ninth night, after exposing the insufficiency of all terrestrial objects to our happiness, he breaks forth into this picturesque, and powerful remonstrance, on death. The latter of the two paragraphs, which I shall now quote, would be quite in the gigantick sublimity of Milton, if it had the simplicity, which (whatever prejudiced pedants may dogmatize to the contrary) beautifully decorates *his* loftiest flights.

Lorenzo ! such the glories of the world !  
 What is the world itself ? Thy world ; a grave !  
 Where is the dust that has not been alive ?  
 The spade ; the plough, disturb our ancestors ;  
 From human mould we reap our daily bread.

The globe around earth's hollow surface shakes ;  
 And is the cieling of her sleeping sons.  
 O'er devastation we blind revels keep ;  
 Whole buried towns support the dancer's heel.  
 The *moist* of human frame the sun exhales ;  
 Winds scatter through the mighty void the *dry*.  
 Earth repossesses part of what she gave ;  
 And the freed spirit mounts on wings of fire.  
 Each element partakes our scattered spoils ;  
 As nature wide, our ruin spreads ; man's death  
 Inhabits all things but the thoughts of man.

Nor man alone ; his breathing bust expires ;  
 His tomb is mortal ; empires die ; where, now,  
 The Roman ; Greek ? They stalk, an empty name !  
 —When down thy vale, unlocked by midnight thought,  
 That loves to wander in thy sunless realms,  
 O ! Death ! I stretch my view ; what visions rise !  
 What triumphs ; toils imperial ; arts divine,  
 In withered laurels, glide before my sight !  
 What length of far-fam'd ages, billowed high  
 With human agitation, roll along,  
 In unsubstantial images of air !  
 The melancholy ghosts of dead renown ;  
 Whispering faint echoes of the world's applause !  
 With penitential aspects, as they pass,  
 All point at earth ; and hiss at human pride ;  
 The wisdom of the wise ; and prancings of the great !

Night IXth. Vol. IVth. pages, 6, 7.

I must quote one sublime passage more,  
 from the ninth night ; on the *Heavens* ;  
 which *declare the glory of God*. It should  
 be quoted, were it only on account of its

reference to a grand, and awful idea of Newton; whose mind, expanded beyond all mortality but his own, comprehended those deeps of complication and immensity, which were hardly imaginable by other men.

O, let me gaze ! of gazing there's no end !  
 O, let me think ! Thought, too, is wilder'd *here*.  
 In midway flight imagination tires ;  
 Yet soon rebrunes her wings, to soar anew ;  
 Her point unable to forbear, or gain ;  
 So great the pleasure ; so profound the plan !  
 A banquet this, where men, and angels, meet ;  
 Eat the same manna ; mingle earth, and Heaven.  
 How distant some of these nocturnal suns !  
 So distant (says the Sage) 'twere not absurd,  
 To doubt, if beams, set out at Nature's birth,  
 Are yet arrived at this so foreign world ;  
 Though nothing half so rapid as *their* flight.  
 An eye of awe, and wonder let me roll ;  
 And roll for ever. Who can satiate sight  
 In such a scene ! in such an ocean wide  
 Of deep astonishment ! where depth ; height ; breadth,  
 Are lost in their extremes ; and where, to count  
 The thick-sown glories, in this field of fire,  
 Perhaps a Seraph's contemplation fails.  
 Now, go, ambition ; boast thy boundless might  
 In conquest, o'er the tenth part of a grain.

Night IXth. Vol. IVth. page, 44.

When he wrote these Night-Thoughts,



he was in his grand climacterick; in his sixty-third year. Examples of this kind ought to impell, and fire us, to prosecute the ingenuous exercise, and exertions of the mind, to the last. What can give us such active, and ethereal entertainment; what can keep us so independent, for our true enjoyment of life, of a trifling, vain, and selfish world? So long as the intellectual strength of the man of temperance, literature, and talents, does not fail, it is always improving; improving in the acquisition of knowledge, and the habits of application. The annals of Young, Dryden, Waller, and of many illustrious men, in arts, and arms; may convince us that the powers of the mind lose not their force, in proportion with those of the body. From these premises, I may venture to assert that our poet could not have written (as he actually *did* not write) so admirably well at twenty-five, or thirty, as he wrote at sixty-three.

*The true Estimate of Human Life* is a treatise which was worthy of being dedicated to a Queen who was ambitious of being thought attentive to learning, and a patroness of its professors. The mis-

fortunes, and miseries of human life, in this long, but eloquent sermon, as I may term his essay; for he prefixes a text to it, are assembled in close, and striking array. It is written very much in Young's manner; which I have already endeavoured clearly, and amply to describe. In this performance, it is his ruling aim, to show, that the practice of virtue, and the anticipation of Heaven, are the only enjoyments; the only consolations of man. One part, however, of the tenour of this work, is, I think, exceptionable: like many Divines, as I have before observed, he too harshly embitters the cup of life; he deprives our employments, and pleasures, of that real satisfaction, with which they are certainly attended, when we prosecute, and enjoy them, without invading the rights; without wounding the welfare of others. Yet it is, on the whole, an excellent Christian discourse; ingeniously, and happily calculated to deliver us from the tyranny of imagination; and to fix in our minds the legitimate empire of reason, and religion.

To *the Centaur not fabulous*, his capital work in prose, great merit must be al-

lowed. He wrote it in his seventy-third year, with the vigour, and fervour of his genius. It contains the beauties, and the faults of Young. The very title, and ruling metaphor, image, or simile of the Centaur, is in *his* singular, and grotesque manner. We have, in this work, his originality; his force, his sublimity; and we have the same unmanly decoration of whimsical, and elaborate ornament. In some of his religious and pious passages, there is more declamation, and eloquence, than moral argument, and moral proof; and this, indeed, must often be the fate of such passages. It is a book, however, which well deserves attentive perusal. It justly, and ardently satirizes vice; and it presents, in bright, and amiable colours, the strongest incentives to virtue.

I must now beg leave to take a view of his *Conjectures on original Composition*, an astonishing work; if we consider the spirit, and fire with which it abounds; and the age of the authour, when it was written. Permit me to let you see how the writers of the *Biographia Britannica* flounder, on this subject. “His Conjectures on original Composition” (say



these gentlemen) “ when considered as  
 “ the composition of a man *turned* of  
 “ eighty, we are not surprized so much  
 “ that it has faults, as how it should *come*  
 “ to have beauties. It is indeed strange  
 “ that the load of fourscore years was not  
 “ able to sink that vigorous fancy which  
 “ here bursts the bounds of judgement;  
 “ and breaks the slavish shackles of age,  
 “ and experience. This work seemed a  
 “ brightening before death;” &c. and  
 more of this old woman’s jargon.—What  
 ideas must *common* readers entertain of  
 many of our great men, if they are satis-  
 fied with the pictures of them which are  
 exhibited by these Dutch dawbers? From  
*their* account one would imagine that in  
 the Conjectures on original Composition,  
 there was not a little of the delirium of old  
 age; that the authour had survived his  
 judgement, and experience. But, in fact,  
 this animated letter would have done him  
 great credit, if he had written it in the  
 meridian of his life: his plan is a generous  
 one; and the execution is worthy of the  
 plan. He stimulates men of talents to  
 quit the low, beaten path of imitation; to  
 take a higher ground; to consider the

celebrated writers of antiquity, as their counsellours, and friends; not as their masters, and dictators; and to trust to the vigour, fertility, and judgement, of their own minds. This advice he establishes on his knowledge of the powers of human nature; and on great examples; and he enforces, and adorns it with a nervous, and oratorical style. There is a juvenile fire; a juvenile rapidity, in his intellectual motions: it is the *cruda Deo, viridisque Senectus*. I never read such a performance of a man of fourscore. Parts of it, indeed, are sunk, *not* by the weight of years, but by the weight of prejudices:—an old Greek prejudice which makes him superstitiously, and extravagantly exalt Pindar, and Homer, above their deserts: this error has been common to *him*, and other famous men; from whose minds we might have expected an emancipation from scholastick trammels: it is an error which only affects the head. But in his Conjectures on original Composition, he suffered a depression from a more inglorious prejudice; from envy, and resentment against a superiour, and departed genius; whom he worshipped with the

profoundest veneration, whilst that genius was upon earth. *This* was a prejudice of the heart; and a deplorable prejudice in *him*, who, through a long life, had been a zealous, powerful; and, I believe, a sincere advocate, for the universally benevolent spirit of Christianity, in verse, and prose. This charge I shall corroborate, hereafter. Let me now take a more particular view of this Essay on original Composition; which deserves a firmer title than that of *Conjectures*.

It cannot be impertinent to recite the following animated paragraph, which describes the effects that original writing produces in the mind of the reader.—  
 “ We read imitation” (says he) “ with  
 “ something of *his* languor, who listens to  
 “ a twice-told tale: our spirits rouse at an  
 “ original; *that* is a perfect stranger; and  
 “ all throng to learn what news from a  
 “ foreign land; and though it comes like  
 “ an Indian prince, adorned with feathers  
 “ only, having little of weight; yet of our  
 “ attention it will rob the more *solid*; if  
 “ not equally *new*. Thus, every telescope  
 “ is lifted at a new-discovered star; it  
 “ makes a hundred astronomers, in a mo-

“ment; and denies equal notice to the  
 “sun. But if an original, by being as  
 “excellent as new, adds *admiration* to  
 “surprize; *then* are we at the writer’s  
 “mercy; on the strong wing of his ima-  
 “gination we are snatched from Britain  
 “to Italy; from climate to climate; from  
 “pleasure to pleasure; we have no home;  
 “no thought of our own; till the magi-  
 “cian drops his pen; and then falling  
 “down into ourselves, we awake to flat  
 “realities; lamenting the change; like  
 “the beggar who dreamt himself a prince.”  
 —Conjectures on original Composition,  
 Vol. Vth. page 91.

In another part of his work, he thus re-  
 monstrates against an implicit, and idola-  
 trous veneration of the ancients.—“But  
 “why are originals so few? Not because  
 “the writer’s harvest is over; the great  
 “reapers of antiquity having left nothing  
 “to be gleaned after them; nor because  
 “the human mind’s teeming-time is past;  
 “or because it is incapable of putting  
 “forth unprecedented births; but because  
 “illustrious examples engross; prejudice;  
 “and intimidate. They engross our at-  
 “tention; and so prevent a due inspec-



“tion of ourselves: they prejudice our  
 “judgement in favour of their abilities;  
 “and so lessen the sense of our own; and  
 “they intimidate us with the splendour  
 “of their renown; and thus under diffi-  
 “dence bury our strength. Nature’s im-  
 “possibilities, and those of diffidence, lie  
 “wide asunder.”—Ibid. p. 93.

In the following passage, the veteran  
 poetical hero stimulates genius to assert  
 its prerogatives, with uncommon energy  
 of sentiment, and style; and undoubtedly,  
 with a conscious, and noble pride in its  
 past achievements.—“Rome was a pow-  
 “erful ally to many states. Ancient au-  
 “thours are *our* powerful allies; but we  
 “must take heed that they do not succour  
 “till they enslave, after the manner of  
 “Rome. Too formidable an idea of their  
 “superiority, like a spectre, would fright  
 “us out of a proper use of our wits; and  
 “*dwarf* *our* understanding, by making a  
 “*giant* of *theirs*. Too great awe for them  
 “lays genius under restraint; and denies  
 “it that free scope; that full elbow-room,  
 “which is requisite for striking its most  
 “masterly strokes. Genius is a master-  
 “work-man; learning is but an instru-

“ ment; and an instrument, though most  
 “ valuable, not always indispensable.  
 “ Heaven will not admit of a partner in  
 “ the accomplishment of some favourite  
 “ spirits; but rejecting all human means,  
 “ assumes the whole glory to itself. Have  
 “ not some, though not famed for erudi-  
 “ tion, so written as almost to persuade  
 “ us that they shone brighter, and soared  
 “ higher, for escaping the boasted aid of  
 “ that proud ally.”—Ibid. Vol. Vth. page  
 97.

From this extraordinary production I  
 have transcribed so much, for two rea-  
 sons:—it contains incitements to literary  
 glory which are, at once, rational, and  
 ardent; and it exhibits vigorous, and  
 blooming specimens of a flourishing men-  
 tal old age, which are almost unparalleled  
 in the annals of learning, and poetry.

I have now arrived at the task of pain-  
 ful justice. You will be pleased to favour  
 me with your attention, while I show you  
 the gross, and I believe, the resentful cri-  
 tical injustice, of which he was guilty to  
 his great superiour, Pope. It is evident  
 to *me*, (otherwise I would not take up the  
 subject in so decided a manner) that the

free remarks of Mr. Pope, on the genius, and poetry of Young, excited in the breast of the latter, a resentment which was, at least, never extinguished till the pious poet ceased to be a writer. We may have reasons even to suspect that these Conjectures on original Composition were not written merely to evince its transcendent excellence above imitative poetry; and embolden aspiring minds to encounter the arduous and splendid object:—I am afraid, that by giving all its merited eulogy to the higher species of composition, he meant incontrovertibly to ascertain Pope's mediocrity in poetry; whom he classes, without reserve, with mere imitative poets. We shall see presently, that he expressed, if he did not sincerely entertain, a very different, a far more advantageous judgment, of that elegant, spirited, and great genius; while his publick opinions were accessible to Pope. We cannot but feel a degree of contempt for that person (however highly respectable he may be, in general) who, in speaking, or in writing, takes those liberties with the dead, which he would not have ventured to take with the living. I do not say, that we may not,

consistently with a manly character, give our opinion more distinctly, and openly, of one who is deceased; of an execrable King, for instance; than we would have published it, while he lived; because the contest would be unequal; our property; our person might be violated by the arm of power. But I think I may venture to aver, that the previous reserve, and dissimulation; and the following unmasked battery; are unquestionable marks of pusillanimity; when the conflict between the living parties could only have been waged by their intellectual powers. As I shall make my present citations only to lay before you his ungenerous hostilities to Pope; it will be but necessary for me to extract short, and detached passages.—

“Imitators and translators” (says he)  
 “are somewhat of the pedestal kind; and  
 “sometimes rather raise their original’s  
 “reputation, by showing him to be by  
 “*them* inimitable, than their own. Ho-  
 “mer has been translated into most lan-  
 “guages.       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*  
 “It is much to be feared that his so nu-  
 “merous translators are but as the pub-  
 “lished testimonials of so many nations,



“and ages, that this authour, so divine, is  
 “untranslated still.”—Conjectures, &c.  
 Vol. Vth. pages 112, 113. After these ob-  
 lique strokes (indeed, they are almost di-  
 rect) he pretends to do justice to Pope as  
 the translator of Homer. He allows that  
 “he has done great things;” but he as-  
 serts that “he *might* have done greater.”  
 He blames him for not translating the  
 Grecian poet into blank verse: and he  
 merely rails against rhyme, as Johnson  
 merely rails against blank verse; for there  
 is as little argument, and fair criticism, in  
 the strictures of the one as of the other,  
 on the two species of verse. I flatter my-  
 self, you will agree with me, that they are  
 both excellent, when atchieved by great  
 masters, in each way. Nothing, however,  
 could be more judicious than Mr. Pope’s  
 choice of rhyme, in translating the Iliad;  
 there was not sense, and force; and well-  
 framed fiction enough in Homer, to bear  
 him up, in English blank verse; and to  
 modern, cultivated judgement. He de-  
 manded all the golden tissue, and variety,  
 that Pope’s elegance, pathos, and vigour  
 could give him; to please distinguishing,  
 and experienced minds. Every thing was

necessary that could be done for him, to make him at all agreeable to unprejudiced readers of taste; rhyme was *one* addition; one ornament; it gave one amusement more; therefore it was an important auxiliary. If you think me presumptuous; and irreverent to Homer; I am only speaking; perhaps, indeed, more explicitly, and frankly, the substance of what Johnson said before.—*I appeal unto Cæsar.*

“ But supposing” (adds Dr. Young)  
 “ Pope’s Iliad to have been perfect in its  
 “ kind, yet it is a translation still; which  
 “ differs as much from an original as the  
 “ moon from the sun.”—*Ibid.* pages 114, 115. This assertion is as defective in logic as it is in generosity. The world *may* have, and it *has*, translations, which are superiour to their originals. I am satisfied, for my own part, that the Iliad of Pope is infinitely finer, and greater than the Iliad of Homer. I have said so much on this subject that I shall say no more. I only beg leave to observe, that, for my part, I am a perfect Endymion; I am enamoured of the moon; she speaks more reason, pleasure, and delight, to my ima-

gination, than her fiery, overpowering brother; whom *Young*, himself, in his calm temper of philosophical contemplation, beautifully terms;

Rude drunkard, rising rosy, from the main !

But I do not mean to pervert the sense in which he compares the two poets with the two luminaries: and in *his* ordinary view, and acceptation of them, Pope is, to *me*, “ the greater; Homer, the lesser ruling light;” to speak in the phraseology of Moses.

After having undervalued the great, and original genius of Swift, with much fastidiousness, and false delicacy; he proposes this question:—“ Would not his friend, Pope, have succeeded better in an original attempt? Talents untried are talents unknown. All that I know, is, that contrary to these sentiments, he was not only an avowed professor of imitation, but a zealous recommender of it also. Nor could he recommend any thing better except emulation, to those who write. One of these, all writers must call to their aid; but aids they are, of unequal repute: imitation

“ is inferiority confessed; emulation is  
 “ superiority contested, or denied. Imita-  
 “ tion is servile; emulation generous;  
 “ *that* fetters; *this* fires; *that* may give a  
 “ name; *this*, a name immortal.” \* \*

“ Emulation exhorts us, instead of learn-  
 “ ing our discipline for ever, like raw  
 “ troops, under ancient leaders in compo-  
 “ sition, to put those laurelled veterans in  
 “ some hazard of losing their superiour  
 “ posts in glory.”

“ Such is emulation’s high spirited ad-  
 “ vice; such her immortalizing call. Pope  
 “ would not hear, pre-engaged with imi-  
 “ tation; which blessed him with all her  
 “ charms. He chose rather, with his  
 “ name-sake of Greece, to triumph in the  
 “ old world, than to look out for a new.  
 “ His taste partook the error of his reli-  
 “ gion; it denied not worship to saints,  
 “ and angels; that is, to writers, who,  
 “ canonized for ages, have received their  
 “ apotheosis, from established, and uni-  
 “ versal fame. True poetry, like true re-  
 “ ligion, abhors idolatry; and though it  
 “ honours the memory of the exemplary,  
 “ as guides, in the way to glory; real,  
 “ though unexampled excellence is its



“ only aim; nor looks it for any inspira-  
 “ tion less than divine.” \* \* \*

\* \* \*

Afterwards, Dr. Young proceeds in the following illiberal, and absurd manner.

“ Though we stand much obliged” [to Pope] “ for his giving us a *Homer*, yet  
 “ had he doubled our obligation by giving  
 “ us a Pope. Had he a strong imagina-  
 “ tion, and the true sublime? *That*  
 “ granted, we might have had two Ho-  
 “ mers instead of one; if longer had been  
 “ his life. For I heard the dying swan  
 “ talk over an epick plan, a few weeks  
 “ before his decease.”—*Ibid.* pages, 117;  
 118; 119.

I shall now give you the amount of the passages which I have last quoted. To save appearances (like his cautious friend, Dr. Warton) he makes it questionable, or doubtful, whether Nature had endowed Pope with vigorous, original, and sublime poetical powers? But it is evident, from what I have already quoted, that he would not allow the most accomplished of poets any of the qualities which I have here specified; that he merely thought him an elegant, accurate, imitative writer; and

that he was so far from possessing fervour, originality, and invention, that his soul was not warm enough even to impell him to emulation.

In answer to this cold, and ungenerous criticism of Dr. Young, first give me leave to take some notice of the emulative spirit, and execution of Pope. I have said so much of this great poet, that I will be as concise as I *can*. I shall wave his victory over Homer; though *that* cannot be reasonably disputed. We all know that he entered the satirical, and epistolary lists with Horace; and I should suppose that every impartial, and judicious reader would be convinced that the Latin original is, in general, comparatively, deficient in force, and variety; and that the English poet is equally spirited, and copious. The strain of Dr. Warburton's annotations, and the remarks of other eminent criticks, flow, to this effect. Here our illustrious Englishman, from the spur of emulation, hath obtained a decided victory over a great Roman.

Young asks "if Pope would have succeeded in an original attempt?" \* \*  
 "If he had a strong imagination, and the

“true sublime?” It cannot, surely, be difficult, satisfactorily, and decisively to answer these questions; though to answer them, gives them more consequence than they deserve; for they are certainly impertinent. *Who*, that only reads his *Eloisa to Abelard*, can doubt whether he had a strong imagination, and the true sublime? The tender and energetick pathos which flows through that poem, as well as several of its passages which are extremely sublime, prove that he completely possessed both these requisites, in a true poet. If *they* who have adopted Dr. Young’s, and Dr. Warton’s estimation of Pope’s poetical abilities, demand more examples of his powers in the sublime; I refer them to his *Prologue to Cato*; to his *Universal Prayer*; to several passages in his *Essay on Man*; and his other works.

It would be tautology, after what I have written, and after what has been written by superiour criticks, elaborately to show, from the *Rape of the Lock* alone, that the question, “Whether he would have succeeded in an original attempt,” must have been a question of palpable superficiality; or of malignant prejudice. By

his Eloisa to Abelard, he moved; he agitated; he enraptured; he completely conquered; he triumphed over the old world; not with a little civick crown; nor with the humbler ovation; but with the pomp, and the laurel, of a splendid hero. By his Rape of the Lock, he discovered, and he subdued, another hemisphere of fancy; and thus our English Alexander was more victorious in poetry, than the Grecian Alexander was, in war.

Young, as I have observed, had a vitiated taste in the sublime, as in other branches of poetry; a taste which he fostered by his practice. His critical palate resembled that of an epicure, which can relish nothing but what is prepared with the richest, and most exquisite culinary art. To *such* a palate; genuine; unadulterated; the most nourishing food; is flat, and insipid. Through all Pope's poetry; through his strongest, and noblest strains; there is ease, and simplicity; they glide; they flow; even in his rapidity there is insinuation, even in the sweep of his all-pervading fire, there is a lambent course. All this might appear to Young to be mere regularity, and imitation. The muse of



Pope, as she mounted, soared steddily, like the eagle; there was no flutter; no struggle; no unexpected wheeling, in her ascent; therefore she did not strike Young; who mistook effort for strength; and eccentricity for grandeur. Hence, the verdict which might have been suggested by a bad taste, was thrown out by envy.

Dr. Young, in his best poetry, has given a direct, and repeated contradiction to the inanimate picture which he afterwards drew of Mr. Pope, as a poet, in his *Conjectures on original Composition*. In his *Love of Fame*; and in his first *Satire*, he distinctly pronounces Pope the first of his cotemporary poets:

Why slumbers Pope, who *leads* the tuneful train;  
Nor hears that virtue which he loves, complain?

The concluding paragraph of his first *Night* is so greatly poetical, that I beg leave to quote the whole:

The spritely lark's shrill matin wakes the morn;  
Grief's sharpest thorn hard pressing on *my* breast.  
I strive with wakeful melody to cheer  
The sullen gloom, sweet Philomel, like thee;  
And call the stars to listen; every star  
Is deaf to *mine*, enamoured of *thy* lay!

Yet be not vain ; there are who thine excell ;  
 And charm through distant ages. Wrapt in shade ;  
 Prisoner of darkness ; to the silent hours,  
 How often I repeat their rage divine ;  
 I lull my griefs ; and steal my heart from woe.  
 I roll *their* raptures ; but not catch their fire !  
 Dark ; though not blind ; like thee, Mæonides ;  
 Or Milton, thee ! ah ! could I reach *your* strain !  
 Or *his*, who made Mæonides our own !  
 Man, too, he sung ; immortal man *I* sing ;  
 Oft bursts my song beyond the bounds of life ;—  
 What, now, but immortality can please !  
 O ! had he pressed his theme ; pursued the track,  
 That opens out of darkness into day !  
 O ! had he mounted on his *wing of fire* ;  
 Soared where *I sink* ; and sung immortal man ;  
 How had it blessed mankind, and rescued *me* !

Close of Night Ist. Vol. III. d. p. 18.

Of the same poet he says that he *made*  
*Mæonides our own* ; and that his transla-  
 tion of Mæonides “ differs as much from  
 “ the original as the moon from the sun.”  
 He would persuade us that this poet is a  
 mere imitative, correct writer ; yet to this  
 very poet, he gives *a wing of fire* ; on  
 which *he* only could mount, who could  
 be, like Pope, original, fervid, and impe-  
 tuous, when he pleased.

Be it observed, that all the lines which

I have now quoted, were written while Mr. Pope was living.

In the beginning of the seventh Night, and very soon after Pope had paid the debt of mortality, he thus apostrophizes his illustrious shade;

Pope! who could'st make immortals, art *thou* dead?  
I give thee joy; nor will I take my leave;  
So soon to follow.

Night VIIth. Vol. III. d. p. 175.

A mere imitative poet, however, is so poor a mortal himself, that, I think, he cannot well, in the poetical meaning of the expression, *make immortals*.

Neither General Young; nor his aid de camp, Dr. Warton, *durst* have written of Pope, during his life, as they wrote of him, after his death. They were even awed into silence, or encomium, by the refracted light, shot from this glorious sun, just after he had sunk into the ocean of eternity. When they had recovered from their sacred fear; when their dread, and worship had left them; had left them convinced that the rampart of time was raised between *them* and *him*; when he had taken possession of his ever-bloom-

ing, and fragrant bower, in the heart of Elysium; *then* they ventured to publish their impotent impertinence to his memory; with a timidity which was equalled by its injustice.

Before I dismiss this immediate subject, I shall take the liberty to transcribe some odd, vague, timid remarks of Mr. Croft. After having quoted the highly encomiastick lines on Pope, from the first Night, he thus proceeds.—“ To the au-  
 “ thour of these lines, Dr. Warton chose,  
 “ in 1756, to dedicate his Essay on the  
 “ Genius and Writings of Pope; which  
 “ attempted, (whether justly or not) to  
 “ pluck from Pope his *wing of fire*; and  
 “ to reduce him to a rank at least one de-  
 “ gree lower than the class of English  
 “ poets. Though the first edition of this  
 “ Essay was, for particular reasons, sup-  
 “ pressed; another was printed. The  
 “ Dedication still remained. To suppose,  
 “ therefore, that Young approved of War-  
 “ ton’s opinion of Pope, is not unnatural.  
 “ Yet the authour of the passage just  
 “ quoted, would scarcely countenance, by  
 “ patronage, *such* an attack upon the fame  
 “ of *him* whom he invokes as his muse.



“ Part of Pope’s third book of the *Odys-*  
 “ sey, deposited in the Museum, is writ-  
 “ ten upon the back of a letter signed  
 “ E. Young; which is clearly the hand-  
 “ writing of *our* Young. The letter dated  
 “ only May 2d. seems obscure; but there  
 “ can be little doubt but the friendship he  
 “ requests was a literary\* one; and that  
 “ he had the highest literary opinion of  
 “ Pope.”

“ Dear Sir,

May 2d.

“ Having been often from home, I  
 “ know not if you have done me the fa-  
 “ vour of calling on me. But be *that* as  
 “ it will, I much want that instance of  
 “ your friendship I mentioned in my last;  
 “ a friendship, I am very sensible I can  
 “ receive from no one but yourself. I  
 “ should not urge this thing so much, but  
 “ for very particular reasons; nor can you  
 “ be at a loss to conceive how a trifle of  
 “ this nature may be of serious moment  
 “ to me; and while I am in hopes of the  
 “ great advantage of your advice about  
 “ it, I shall not be so absurd as to make

\* “ I am told it was a prologue to one of his tragedies.”

“any further step without it. I know  
 “you are much engaged; and only hope  
 “to hear of you at your entire leisure. I  
 “am, Sir, your most faithful, and obe-  
 “dient servant,

“E. YOUNG.”

“Nay, even after Pope’s death” (continues Mr. Croft) “he says, in Night seven,

Pope, who couldst make immortals, art *thou* dead?

“Either Warton, then, dedicated his  
 “book to a patron who disapproved its  
 “doctrine; or Young, in his old age, bar-  
 “tered, for a dedication, an opinion enter-  
 “tained of his friend, through all that  
 “part of life, when he could best form  
 “opinions.”—Croft’s *Life of Young: Lives of the Poets: Vol. IVth.* pages: 406; 407; 408.

I will not entertain so poor an opinion of Mr. Croft’s penetration as not to be satisfied that he saw the true state of this literary case. He must have declined from being explicit, for some personal, and not very manly reasons. One might imagine that he had forgotten that Young

wrote his *Conjectures on original Composition*; those *Conjectures* were published in the year 1759: and Warton's book on Pope came out three years before. The most liberal mind, if it will honestly speak out, cannot doubt that Warton was perfectly acquainted with the opinion of Pope, which Young wished to have published to the world. The man whom he had been anxious to consult, as his poetical oracle; whom he had exalted to the cerulean summit of Parnassus, he now sunk to the dull region of mediocrity; to the humble vale of imitation. I doubt not that he had actually employed Dr. Warton to open the literary campaign: if he *did*; I have still a meaner opinion of the instrument of this envy, than of its first mover. Whatever may be my faults, as a man, or a writer (and I fear that, in both views, they are many) I love to speak the truth; without reserve, and without malevolence; whenever I feel it incumbent on me to speak it. With whatever misconduct I may be charged; no one will tax me with the cautious, and nice trimming; with the Atticus-like prudence, of Mr. Croft. My generous criticks have

often refused to distinguish between an allowable; a commendable warmth, and malignity. In polite literature, especially, I never thought that what was coldly written, deserved to be read. Let your hireling criticks rail; or let them affect to despise; I will never write with the conceit of apathy; I will never write with an intellectual morbid non-chalance; when my own honest fame; or *that* of a *great* authour is in question. You will, therefore, excuse my particular, and diffusive account of Young's, and Warton's ungenerous treatment of one of the first of poets; you will excuse my particular, and warm vindication of him. Neither the excuse, nor the vindication are foreign to my present, nor to my grand general object:—a solicitous, and anxious wish to restore, as far as *my* little contribution can operate, a taste for genuine, but depressed poetry, amongst us. And nothing can tend more to *reproduce* this charming disposition of sentiment, than a proper estimate *of*, and taste *for*, *Pope*. The pretended critical judgement of Young, on our most elegant, spirited, and nervous poet; a judgement, that was first echoed,



in publick, by Dr. Warton; before his old, and venerable master ventured, and condescended, in publick, to reverberate his own echo; under the mask of impartiality; nay, under the mask of friendship; this unjust, and injurious judgement hath since been adopted by many little imitative criticks; equally destitute of learning, and of talents. He, who is industrious to repell these hostilities; to refute these errors; and consequently, to prevent their future propagation; is a friend to the republick of letters.

I have not yet done with Young's injustice to Pope. He attacks him in another, and more covered way. He sacrifices him at the shrine of Addison. That the sacrifice may be more magnificent; and to make the thrust at Pope *as* effectual, but more oblique; Swift is likewise immolated, at the same shrine. He tells us, what no impartial, judicious, and animated critick will believe; that "the wing of Addison mounts him above his cotemporaries."—P. 133. Addison was a very classical; a very fine genius; if you please; but soaring very high; and especially above his great cotemporaries, was

not *his* talent. “He has” (says Dr. Young) “a more refined; decent; judicious; and extensive genius than Pope, or Swift. To distinguish this triumvirate from each other; and, like Newton, to discover the different colours, in these genuine, and meridian rays of literary light;—*Swift* is a singular wit; *Pope*, a correct poet; *Addison*, a great *authour*.”—*Ibid.* p. 133. If Newton, Dr. Young, had not been more accurately acquainted with solar, than *you* are, with intellectual light, as you, here, expose yourself, our unparalleled philosopher would have missed a part of that immense fame which he hath justly acquired. As our critick has indulged himself in a luxuriant parade of false, and feminine delicacy, on the objects of Swift’s imagination, I am very willing to refuse the palm of decency to that very great man, and to give it to Addison. Both Swift, and Pope, however, were endowed with more forcible, and original genius, than Addison. Their genius was not less; but more various; more extensive, than *his*; and in judgement, they were his equals. We expatiate, with reluctance, on subjects

which are almost evident, of themselves; and it is difficult for a mind of any generosity to keep its temper sufficiently collected for discussion; when illiberal, and invidious disparagements are thrown on departed, and capital genius. I own that I feel an indignation (and I cannot but think it warrantable) for the flagrant injury which is here done to the memory of Pope. A great poet is a superiour being to a great prose-writer. To be a first-rate poet, demands more enlarged; elegant; and interesting intellect; more vigour; fertility; fire, and harmony of imagination; than any other mental excellence. And surely, in Pope, we have decency; judgement; extent; and refinement of poetical genius, in their most complete, and high perfection. As it would be absurd, and ridiculous, to compare Pope, and Addison, as poets, I shall not deign deliberately to compare them. Pope had those various, rich, and glowing characteristicks, which Nature grants but to a few, far more eminently than Addison; therefore, Pope was far the more rare, and exalted genius.

After showing the dramattick defects of

the tragedy of Cato;—"How rich in reputation must that authour be," (says Young) "who can spare a Cato, without feeling the loss!"—P. 133. As a poet, (who is the first of human artists, in penetrating the heart, and soul) if you rob Addison of his Cato, you impoverish him indeed. He cannot spare that tragedy, by any means: it has not invention; it has not originality; the prologue, written by Pope, in poetical excellence; in force; beauty; and sublimity of poetry, is worth the whole play; while Pope was *serving*, he was *eclipsing* his friend: and yet it is certain that Addison hath shown far more vigour, and expression, as a poet, in his Cato, than in any of his other poetical productions.

"And yet (perhaps you have not observed it)" (continues Young to his friend Richardson) "what is the common language of the world; and even of his admirers, concerning him? They call him an elegant writer: *that* elegance which shines on the surface of his compositions, seems to dazzle their understanding; and render it a little blind to the depth of sentiment which lies be-



“neath. Thus, (hard fate!) he loses  
 “reputation with them, by doubling his  
 “title to it. On subjects the most in-  
 “teresting, and important, no authour of  
 “his age has written with greater; I  
 “had almost said, with *equal* weight:  
 “and they who commend him for his  
 “elegance, pay him such a sort of com-  
 “pliment, by their abstemious praise, as  
 “they would pay to Lucretia, if they  
 “should commend her only for her  
 “beauty.”—Ibid: pages, 134; 135.

This is a very exaggerated representation of the acumen of Addison’s mind. Neither his unprejudiced admirers, nor his ingenuous enemies, can so properly characterize his productions by any single word, as by *elegance*. Justness, and beauty of thought, and sentiment, are the essential constituents of *my* idea of elegance. As to that elegance which shines on the surface of his compositions, by which, I suppose, Dr. Young means, his choice, and arrangement of words; I can say nothing to *it*; for when I view it singly, I can have no distinct, and positive conception of it; it makes, of itself, so lifeless an object, that it deserves no praise.

It is the substance, and mode of thinking, which form, and produce the style. From clear, strong, and noble ideas, naturally; necessarily, result congenial expressions; and a congenial order of expression. The language of a weak, or confused thinker, is not worth mentioning. Addison, if we consider all his excellencies, is, undoubtedly, one of the first prose-writers, in the English language; he is a *fine* writer. Whatever Dr. Young may have thought, or may have affected to think, of his weight, and depth of thinking; *these* are not, in *him*, distinguishing properties. As a critick; a moralist; a divine; (for in his serious papers he is a most attractive preacher) his great merit consists in giving sentiments which might arise to common good sense, and reflexion, their full substance, and their natural decorations; in presenting them in happy combinations; and in a clear, and picturesque light. Analogous to his thoughts is his language; it has not the variety; the force; the fire, of original, and commanding genius; it is perspicuous; luminous; adorned with chaste; with most engaging graces. In revolving a subject thoroughly; in sur-

veying it in its different points of view; in exploring, and illuminating its depths; in discussing it completely, to all appearance, in the compass of a short essay, perhaps the authour of the Rambler has excelled all other writers. In these respects, Mr. Addison is much his inferiour. Consequently, the style of Johnson is more forcible, and comprehensive, than that of Addison; but it has not the fine simplicity; the Attic beauties of Addison: with all its admirable powers, it is often formal; stiff; and scholastick. For Johnson's mind, both by nature, and by habit, had repelled the softer graces; but there never was a more just, and refined taste than Addison's.

In the writings of this great man, genius is principally, and peculiarly displayed, in his polite, and fine humour; in the delicate, but poignant irony, with which he describes human failings, and extravagancies. With this talent is intimately connected his consummate art in drawing characters of pleasing, and engaging singularity; characters, which will always attract, and delight mankind; because they are founded on nature; and interest

our affections. *These* excellencies Johnson *never* could attain; his moral knowledge was chiefly theoretical, with the living manners of men; with the nicer discriminations of character, he was but little acquainted. Hence, his humour, and his characters (for he sometimes attempts both) are as uninteresting, and vapid, as they are elaborate.

Let me not be thought uncharitable, if I cannot but suspect that Young's high, and unmerited praise of Addison's virtue, and practical piety, partly flowed from an ungenerous dislike of Pope. Young must have well known the base treatment which Pope received from Addison; treatment, which, at length, extorted from our generous, and divine poet, that severe, and immortal retaliation which it well deserved. Young bestows on Addison's mode of dying a profusion of superstition; of holy bombast. "By their fruits ye shall know them." A good, and generous tenour of life is an infallible moral criterion of the heart, and mind: the clergy naturally lay a great stress on the scene of a death-bed; a disinterested, and liberal man lays *none*. The influence of a distemper may shake



the best of souls with unmerited horror; a natural, and habitual firmness of mind may enable a bad character to quit this earthly stage with calmness, and decorum. I wish to maintain the faith of Johnson; and to avoid the infidelity of Bolingbroke, and Hume; but, with the religion of Johnson, let me meet death, like *them*, unappalled, and serene; not with the superstitious, and gloomy fears, of our very unequal, and inconsistent Christian philosopher.

Mr. Addison lent his friend Sir Richard Steele, a hundred pounds: and sent an execution into his house, because he could not pay the money. He translated the first book of the Iliad, from his envy of Pope's fortune, and glory: he prevailed with Tickell to pretend that *he* was the authour of the translation: a miserable translation it *was*, comparatively with Pope's; yet to Pope's, Addison gave it a decided, and publick preference. I want only *these* facts, to pronounce upon the general virtue of the man who commits them. I am far from presuming to think that they might not be forgiven by a merciful God. I shall only say that I can at-

tribute no virtuous, and exemplary merit to the death of such a man. It may have been a rational, and serene death; in consequence of a long, and sincere repentance; it may have been an acting; a theatrical death; effected by assumed fortitude, and artful hypocrisy.

I am afraid that I ought strenuously to apologize for this digression; but I know that you will forgive me; if I at all deserve to be forgiven. You will be lenient to that zeal; to that enthusiasm, if you please, which I feel for Pope; you will not think those excursions from my main subject altogether impertinent, and absolutely digressive, which are, certainly, in *some* degree, connected with it; and in which, I flatter myself, I have not been inattentive to literary criticism, and moral observations.

As, of the two, I would rather be censured with redundancy, than with material omission, I think it proper to say something, here, of Dr. Young's talent in writing prose. We may observe, in general, in prose that is written by favourites of the Muses, the vivacity, and colouring of the poet; there is this animation, and

this lustre, in the unmeasured diction of Young. *His* eloquence, and that of Pope, have much the same merit; they are both worthy of great men; but they are far surpassed by the prose of Dryden; which flows with a spirit peculiar to its authour; with a majesty; a magnificence of manner; metaphor; and simile, that would have done honour to the greatest orator.

From the two sermons which are inserted in his works, we may infer that he was not a happy writer for the pulpit. We have a very long discourse, which he preached before the House of Commons, on the 30th of January. It treats kings with a profound, and courtly homage: it is not adapted to general apprehension; for the thoughts are affectedly sententious; and they are complex, and pointed; in *his* favourite way.

A short time before his death, he published his poem of *Resignation*. It is far inferiour to his *great* poetical compositions; it shows that his flame of poetry, as well as his vital activity, were, now, subsiding. I shall be bold enough, however, to quote Johnson's absolute contradiction of this opinion: when I meet with

just, and vigorous criticism, in the writings of this great man, I am not surprized; I am as little surprized when I meet with arrogant, and dictatorial absurdities.

“ His last poem” (says he) “ was *The Resignation*; in which he made, as he “ was accustomed, an experiment of a “ new mode of writing; and succeeded “ better than in his *Ocean*, or his *Merchant*. It was very falsely represented, “ as a proof of decaying faculties. There “ is *Young*, in every stanza; such as he “ often was, in his highest vigour.”—*Life of Young*: p. 428.

In answering this dogma, I can only be at the pains to refer my sensible audience to the poem itself. By what reason Johnson was induced to give this poem an eulogy which it by no means deserved, it is not easy to discover; perhaps two of his reasons were, its piety; and its expostulations with Voltaire. But what violation of poetical justice may we not expect from a critick, who made a poet of Mother Watts; and of Sir Richard Blackmore;—of *rough*; and *fierce*; and *rumbling* memory?



It appears that this poem was written, to gratify two ladies. Vanity, like our other passions, is contagious; and Young, even in his old age, might catch it. He must be of a rougher make than mine, who can censure this weakness (if, indeed, it deserves that humiliating appellation) in one, who had devoted a very long life to poetry; to virtue; to religion; who, as Dryden says of the spirit in the Lyre; had “sung so sweetly, and so well.” I own, I am pleased that he wrote *Resignation*. Nothing should be more interesting to man, than the history of the human mind. To mark the gradual, and early progress; the gradual, and late decay, of genius; is, to gain useful, and important accessions, both to moral, and intellectual knowledge. But let us hear what sentence the judges of the biographical tribunal pronounce on this last work of a very aged poet: I mean, the collectors of the *Biographia Britannica*. “*That* taper which “blazed as it declined” (say these literary clowns) “was, at last, *shamefully* exhibited to the publick, as burning in the “socket; in a poem intituled, *The Resig-* “*nation*; the last, and worst of all Dr.

“ Young’s performances. This he published but a short time before his death; which happened, April 12th; 1765.”—  
 Biog. Britan. Supplement: Article, Young: pages, 258, 259. Printed, anno, 1766.—  
*O! fools, and slow of heart*, to feel the force of reason, and humanity!

In great attempts, ’tis glorious, even to fail !

What shame; what discredit, could it reflect on Young, that while he was taking his leave of the world, he wrote, on his good old principles, as well as he possibly *could*; but not with that vigour with which he wrote before? In extreme old age, a state of perfect ease, is, at least, allowable; but in strenuous exertion, at that commonly desponding period, there is a peculiar glory; though that exertion should be short of its aim. Why, ye manglers of poetry; ye butchers of fair fame; the great man was dying consistently, and heroically; he was dying in a splendid profession; it was Young, launching into the eternal world, which he had long contemplated; it was Agesilaus, fighting his old age, and the Egyptians, a little before he expired; it was the late

illustrious Chatham; pleading, with his dying breath, the cause of equal, and harmonious government; the cause of political, and civil liberty.

By the apology which Young himself makes for his writing so late in life, these cold, and heavy criticks, would have been softened into sentiments more mild, and just; if *rocks* could be mollified.

“ If” (says he) “ we consider life’s end-  
 “ less evils, what can be more prudent  
 “ than to provide for consolation under  
 “ them? A consolation under them, the  
 “ wisest of men have found in the plea-  
 “ sures of the pen: witness, among many  
 “ more, Thucydides; Xenophon; Tully;  
 “ and Seneca; Pliny the younger; who  
 “ says;—“ In uxoris infirmitate, et ami-  
 “ corum periculo, aut morte turbatus, ad  
 “ studia, unicum doloris levamentum con-  
 “ fugio.”—“ And why not add to *these*,  
 “ their modern equals; Chaucer; Raw-  
 “ leigh; Bacon; Milton; Clarendon; un-  
 “ der the same shield; unwounded by  
 “ misfortune; and nobly smiling in dis-  
 “ tress?

“ Composition was a cordial to *these*,  
 “ under the frowns of Fortune; but evils

“ there *are*, which *her* smiles cannot pre-  
 “ vent, or cure. Among *these*, are the  
 “ languours of old age! If those are held  
 “ honourable, who, in a hand benumbed  
 “ by time, have grasped the just sword, in  
 “ defence of their country; shall *they* be  
 “ less esteemed, whose unsteady pen vi-  
 “ brates to the last, in the cause of reli-  
 “ gion; of virtue; of learning? Both *these*  
 “ are happy in *this*, that by fixing their  
 “ attention on objects most important,  
 “ they escape numberless little anxieties;  
 “ and that *tædium vitæ*, which often  
 “ hangs so heavy on its evening-hours.  
 “ May not this insinuate some apology  
 “ for *my* spilling ink, and spoiling paper,  
 “ so late in life?”—Conjectures on Original Composition: Vol. Vth. pages, 88, 89.

I shall now quote, and examine the two concluding paragraphs of Johnson's critical observations on Young. They are as erroneous; odd; inconsistent, and unaccountable, as many of his other effusions.

“ His versification is his own; neither  
 “ his blank, nor his rhyming lines have  
 “ any resemblance to those of former  
 “ writers: he picks up no hemisticks; he



“copies no favourite expressions; he  
 “seems to have laid up no stores of  
 “thought, or diction; but to owe all to  
 “the fortuitous suggestions of the present  
 “moment. Yet I have reason to believe,  
 “that when once he had formed a new  
 “design, he then laboured it with very  
 “patient industry; and that he composed  
 “with great labour, and frequent re-  
 “visions.

“His verses are formed by no certain  
 “model; for he is no more like himself,  
 “in his different productions than he is  
 “like others. He seems never to have  
 “studied prosody; nor to have had any  
 “direction but from his own ear. But  
 “with all his defects, he was a man of  
 “genius, and a poet.”—Vol. IVth. p. 431.  
 octavo edition.

The remark, that his thoughts, and dic-  
 tion resemble not those of other poets,  
 ought not to have been a remark particu-  
 larly applied to Young: it is applicable to  
 every poet, who, with *him*, can claim vi-  
 gour, and originality. To suppose that  
 he had laid up no stores of sentiment, and  
 style, is to rank him with those numerous  
 petty writers, who play off their transitory

vapours, without previous reading, and reflexion. How is it possible for an author to acquire eminence, and celebrity; without having carefully perused the great masters of literary thought, and expression; without having worked them into the texture; into the essence of his mind? Do not the productions of Young evidently show, not only the man of capital talents; but likewise the accomplished scholar; the close, and profound thinker; the sublime philosopher? But to say that he sat down to write, without having laid up any intellectual treasures; is really to class him with those illiterate, vain people, who fancy that they can be distinguished writers, because they are presumptuously *determined* to write. That active, and plastick intellect, which reads; reflects; and thinks, to such excellent purposes; prevents mental indigestion, and superficiality; prevents mean, and dull plagiarism. From *such* an intellect, be assured, you have many advantages, from literature; many, from a long, and accurate experience, and use, of language. But you have no *cold*, and *servile* imitation; you have no impertinent, and osten-

tatious pedantry; you have no Dutch, tessellated fabrick. His learning, as Sprat says of Cowley, with an injudicious, or flattering complaisance, is *not embossed on his mind, but enamelled*. The gold which he has acquired by a persevering, and ambitious application, is melted down, with that which he inherited from Nature, by the fervour of his genius, into one glowing mass:—that mass takes proportion; symmetry; animation; and eloquence, from the finishing hand of the master; judgement gives a form to the flow which was produced by ardour. From this natural, and powerful confederacy, of elegant knowledge, and art, with ethereal spirit; the beautiful, and striking system has the merit of being exclusively his own; since there is only *one Being* who is capable of *absolute* creation.

No sensible, and manly writer ever owed “all his thoughts to the fortuitous suggestions of the present moment;” because every such writer must have a plan, or design. But the most deliberate, and comprehensive mind will always owe *much* to the suggestions of that moment.

He has formed the plan; the outline of his work; but what particular expression it will gain; how, in many places it will be filled; must be left to the moment of progressive, expanding, and working genius; to the moment of inspiration. In *one* sense, these suggestions may be termed fortuitous; the poet is not satisfied with *any* ideas that arise lightly, and rapidly in his mind; but in the intenseness of his thinking; in the current of his imagination; he will select from different ideas, some which he prefers to the rest; and of which he perceived not even the embryo, when he sat down to write. It will sometimes happen, too, that in a moment, the most fortunate image will meet, and strike him; such an image as he could never have raised by the most eager exertions of the mind. By what intellectual operation, and result, such an image springs up, I leave to those to explain, who pretend to account for *every* thing: the fact has often been experienced by those who are habituated to composition. In these views; and in these, only, it can, with any propriety be said, that Young, or, indeed,



any authour of common sense, was indebted “ to the fortuitous suggestions of “ the present moment.”

We are told by Johnson that the man “ who owed all to the suggestions of the “ present moment,” *did* “ form designs:” and we are likewise tautologously told, that “ he then laboured them with very “ patient industry; and that he composed “ with great labour;” &c. You will forgive me if I do not argue with a man, when he deserts common sense. I should not have deigned to quote him, here; nor in many other places, were it not from my ardent wish to remove from the minds of the literary publick, that dictatorial, and tyrannical imposition which they have long suffered from *a name*.

Dr. Johnson asserts that “ Young copies no favourite expressions.” This is a great mistake. I could give more proofs than one, that he has not only copied a favourite expression, but even the persuit of a favourite thought. However, that I may not be tedious, I shall give but one example of each kind. The first Night contains the following fine verses;

A soul immortal, spending all her fires ;  
 Wasting her strength in *strenuous idleness* ;  
 Thrown into tumult ; raptured, or alarmed,  
 At aught *this* scene can threaten, or indulge ;  
 Resembles ocean into tempest wrought,  
 To waft a feather, or to drown a fly.

Night Ist.

Here you will observe, that the *strenua nos exercet inertia*, of Horace, is literally copied; for it is literally translated. In the fifth Night, are these lines, equally instructive, and poetical;

Virtue, for ever frail, as fair, below ;  
 Her tender nature suffers in the croud ;  
 Nor touches on the world, without a stain.  
 The world's infectious: few bring back, at eve,  
 Immaculate, the manners of the morn.  
 Something we thought, is blotted ; we resolved,  
 Is shaken ; we renounced, returns again.  
 Each salutation may slide in a sin,  
 Unthought before ; or fix a former flaw.

Night Vth.

This is but a free translation of a passage of Seneca: I have taken notice of the two passages before. “ *Nunquam à turbà  
 “ mores quos habui, refero; aliquid ex eo  
 “ quod composui, turbatur; aliquid ex his  
 “ quæ fugavi, redit; inimica est multo-  
 “ rum conversatio.* ”—Seneca,

“He is no more like himself” (says our great critick) “in his different productions, than he is like others.” This is a strange misrepresentation of his poetical complexion. I am tired of attending to absurdities, which are only sanctified by prejudice. I grant that he has very little resemblance to any poet but himself. But his own predominant manner he can never totally suppress. It is prominent in the passion of his tragedies; in the solemnity of his Night-Thoughts; it discriminates even his *Love of Fame*, from the compositions of all other poets: he is, *there*, not so much at his ease as I could wish; though he is not seated on his gorgeous poetical throne.

Young had made another gross omission; according to the critical theory of Johnson. “He seems never to have studied prosody; nor to have had any direction but from his own ear.” The plodding idea of *study* is not applicable to an English poet’s acquisition of English prosody; it glides into his mind imperceptibly; it flows spontaneously, with his genius. “He had not any direction but from his own ear.” I should be glad to

know what *other* direction a poet needs, in versification, but his own ear, or, to speak more pertinently, and effectually, *his own poetical soul*. As to the study of prosody, let it employ the lucubrations of those, who, in spite of Nature, *will* be poets; or, of the unhappy boys, who, without any talents for poetry, are obliged, by the stupid, and barbarous tyranny of schoolmasters, to count their poetical *feet* upon their fingers. What Dr. Johnson hath asserted concerning the originality of his thoughts, and numbers, concerning their peculiarity to himself, is perfectly just and true.

“With all his defects,” (adds our critic) “he was a man of genius, and a “poet.” He was, in fact, a man of *great* genius; he was a *great* poet. His works abound with the utmost poetical vigour; originality; and sublimity; therefore, it is absurd not to allow that he was a *great* poet. After this encomium, I am sure you will not charge me with a Johnsonian incongruity for having animadverted on his faults. Faults, alas! will always make a part of the human character, even in its extreme greatness! Nay, the benevolent



Creator balances his beam of justice here below, with a divine accuracy; to console *humble*, to teach humility to *exalted* souls; to convince weak, or wicked men, that the universe is governed by a *Supreme Mind!* They who cultivate the noblest virtues, and the noblest genius, commonly *sink* as *low*, by their *faults*, as they *soar high*, by their *flame*. Religious, and critical inquisitors may *damn* them; but perhaps they will be *pardoned* by *you*.

Young was deficient in judgement, and taste; hence he was excluded from the very *summit* of Parnassus. He was deficient in the reasoning faculty; it is not the faculty that crushes the powers of imagination; as Dr. Warton has observed: no; it leads them to consummate greatness; he was deficient in the *image of God*. It was the excellence of *this* faculty which made Milton, Dryden, and Pope superiour even to Young, and to Gray; it was the excellence of *this* faculty which made them superiour to Akenside; and far superiour to Parnell; to Goldsmith; and to Smart. Assiduous be our culture; profound be our veneration of *reason!* It is as powerful an auxiliary; it is as indis-

pensable a concomitant, of the fine arts, as it is of science: it was given us to regulate, and enhance our dearest pleasures; our dearest interests; to establish, and watch over our perpetual fame, and our perpetual happiness; it is our harbinger, and our guide, to each immortality.

According to my custom, you will permit me to take a view of the moral character of Young: it shall be but a short one; for I have been obliged to take some particular notice of that character as I proceeded in my remarks on his writings. “Whatever promotes virtue,” (says Young himself) “promotes something more; and carries its good influence beyond the moral man.”—Conjectures on original Composition; Vol. Vth. p. 110. I have repeatedly observed, (and principally from my regard for the happiness of those *young* persons who may make a part of my audience) that generous principles, and generous conduct, have a natural, and strong tendency, to invigorate, and exalt the intellectual achievements of the mind. Virtue is a friend to all those passions which are attended with no evil consequences; and which promote the welfare,

and, therefore, the real pleasure of mankind. These passions, indeed, may be termed the ramifications, or the blossoms of virtue. It is *her* province to preserve health; independence of the world; peace, and serenity of mind; clearness, and acuteness of understanding; expansion, and brightness of imagination; therefore I need not surely add, that she contributes more than *any other* aid, to secure, and aggrandize the triumphs of literary ambition. As an object, or a habit, she is simple, yet sublime: her practice, and her influence, give a purity; a dignity; a majesty of thinking: this tone of soul mixes with our efforts in literature; refines their spirit; collaterally buoys them up, as they ascend; and raises them to its own celestial heights.

Young was a sincerely virtuous, and a pious man. His virtue, and piety, however, were not of a robust make. They throve, in the shades of solitude, and retirement: *there*, conscience bore them its delightful testimony; there, they consoled the heart; animated the genius; and befriended the neighbours of their possessor. But when they were removed into

the world, they caught its contagion; their theory had not influence enough to produce a corresponding practice: he grew fond of splendid, and powerful society; and this fever of the mind was the cause of much unsuccessful, and degrading adulation. In September, 1764, “ he added “ a kind of codicil” [to his will] “ wherein “ he made it his dying intreaty to his “ housekeeper, to whom he left £1000, “ that all his manuscripts might be de- “ stroyed as soon as he was dead; which “ would greatly oblige her deceased “ friend.”—Croft; p. 416. “ Were every “ thing that Young ever wrote to be published” (says Mr. Croft) “ he would only “ appear, perhaps, in a less respectable “ light, as a poet; and more despicable, “ as a dedicator; he would not pass for a “ worse Christian; or for a worse man.”—P. 409. If this passage is sense, it is certainly paradoxical. Surely *the despicable dedicator* must lower our opinion of *the moral agent*; surely, flattery, and servility derogate considerably from the good man; and by a necessary consequence, from the good Christian.

Some parts of the fortune of Young



will always be mysterious. That talents, and virtue should be unsuccessful, is not altogether new: but that very eminent talents, and great decorum of manners, joined to an intimacy with several statesmen; some of whom were worthy men, and had a taste for polite learning; that all these advantages, with his profusion of eulogy, should not have raised a good clergyman, and a great poet, higher in the church than to the rectory of Welwyn; is a problem, in society, of difficult solution. There is something, indeed, equally odd, and unaccountable, in his conduct, and in his fortune. It is rather surprizing that he should have missed his aim at ecclesiastical dignities; it is rather surprizing that *he*, who had long actuated, and filled solitude with the finest imagery; with imagery which ought to detach the soul from sublunary objects;—it is rather surprizing that *this* man should have persued his aim, with disingenuous, and debasing arts.

To the good clergyman I revert with a particular pleasure. That he was highly esteemed as a parish-priest, was demonstrated to me by an occurrence which

happened to myself. I trust that it will demonstrate likewise to *you*, Dr. Young's parochial excellence; and it will be rather entertaining. Give me leave, then, to relate it to you. About seventeen years ago, when some business had called me into Hertfordshire, I visited the abode of Dr. Young, at Welwyn. The house in which he had lived, was not a parsonage-house; it was the Doctor's property; and was then possessed by his son; who, when I viewed it, was not upon the spot. His old house-keeper was there; who, with great civility, showed me the house, and garden. I was in his bed-chamber; where, she told me he frequently rung, in the night, for light; and pen and ink, and paper. She showed me the room where he used to dine; and where his last illness seized him, a little after dinner. A tear, with the eloquence of which I was penetrated, rushed into her eye. A feeling mind inevitably visits such scenes, with a kind of worship, and idolatry. After I had thoroughly surveyed this hallowed mansion; hallowed by his virtues, and by his genius; I walked through the village; and joined a few decent; grave; elderly men,

who were conversing in the street. I asked them if they remembered, and knew their rector, Dr. Young? Their answer was, that “it would be strange if they “could *forget* him.” After the inquiries which I thought most important, I learned from their united, and earnest information, that he was an excellent, and exemplary parish-minister; as well as a famous man; exact in his practice, but cheerful in his manners; constant, and zealous, in the duties of his office; but particularly attentive to his poor, and distressed parishioners; whom he visited, and relieved, like a tender, and affectionate father. You see, the Night-Thoughts had not evaporated in poetry. To close this narrative; and to corroborate its evidence; while I was talking to these good people, a ragged, ill-looking fellow came up to us; who seemed to be the notorious profligate of the village. When he found that we were talking of Dr. Young, he said something disparaging; and contemptuous, of his memory. One of my companions gave him a look of severe reproof; and added:—“Dr. Young could only be “disliked by such men as *you*.”

Let us take our leave of him for the present, while we view him in this engaging; in this captivating light. While, with such a mind as *he* possessed, he was the master, and disposer of his own time; in his hallowed retirement, at Welwyn; hallowed, by the abode of a good, and great man; while he was there, intent on the glorious pursuits of literature, and poetry; or on the more sacred duties of a clergyman, and a Christian; he had reason to thank Providence for his external disappointments. *So* he must often have thought, himself; as it is evident from his works, that he fully estimated, as they deserved, the virtuous exercise, and pleasures of the mind. I must make *one* citation more from his *Conjectures on original Composition*; it will be of great use to us, if we think, and act properly, after giving it our serious consideration; it will detach us from the fluctuating, and tumultuous ocean of trifles, and of vice; from the region of intoxication; of pain; of mortification; and it will fix us, for the best enjoyment of our existence, on a foundation of adamant.

While we are constant, as writers, to the



service of virtue,—“ The more composi-  
 “ tion” (says he) “ the better. To men of  
 “ letters, and leisure, it is not only a noble  
 “ amusement; but a sweet refuge. It  
 “ improves their parts; and promotes  
 “ their peace: it opens a back-door, out  
 “ of the bustle of this busy, and idle world,  
 “ into a delicious garden of moral, and  
 “ intellectual fruits, and flowers; the key  
 “ of which is denied to the rest of man-  
 “ kind. When stung with idle anxieties;  
 “ or teized with fruitless impertinence; or  
 “ yawning over insipid diversions; *then*  
 “ we perceive the blessings of a *lettered*  
 “ recess. With what a gust do we retire  
 “ to our disinterested, and immortal  
 “ friends, in our closet; and find our  
 “ minds, when applied to some favourite  
 “ theme, as naturally, and as easily, qui-  
 “ eted, and refreshed, as a peevish child  
 “ (and peevish children are we all, till we  
 “ fall asleep!) when laid to the breast!  
 “ Our happiness no longer lives on cha-  
 “ rity; nor bids fair for a fall, by leaning  
 “ on that most precarious, and thorny pil-  
 “ low, *another's pleasure*, for *our* repose.  
 “ How independent of the world is *he*,  
 “ who can daily find new acquaintance,

“ that, at once entertain, and improve  
 “ him;—in the *little* world; the minute,  
 “ but fruitful creation, of his own mind!”  
 —Conjectures on original Composition;  
 Vol. Vth. pages, 87, 88.

Take, my friends, this advice; take this representation of our purest, our sublimest happiness, while we are on earth (whatever our station, and external powers *are*) —from a very old man; from a man of great talents; and of long, and varied experience; who thoroughly knew, by many practical instances, how insufficient is the pageantry of life; or the smiles of Fortune, to our real well-being; who thoroughly knew that we might very probably be deceived out of our happiness, by *others*; but that the generous God of universal nature, had formed us capable of ascertaining it to *ourselves*. The true happiness of man is proved, without any complex demonstration: is not his *mind* the nobler part of his constitution? Must not he be happiest, then, in the virtuous exercise of this nobler part? While he is employed in *this* exercise, trifles, and vice, are totally excluded; he is impassive to the depravation of sensual pleasure: tem-

perance is, then, his natural companion, and his friend; and *thus* ample provision is made for the welfare of the whole human system. While Cicero disputes, before him, in his Tusculan recess; while Sherlock proposes to him his arguments for virtue, and a future state; while the ghosts of Socrates, and Cato, pass, in review, before him; the merely nominal, and titular great, are annihilated, to his imagination; he feels no envy of their splendour; no solicitude for their protection. When the poet, who has been the subject of these discourses; who, in his own words, was *crowned; shadowed with the laurels of Apollo*; when the infirmity of *his* vigorous mind was cured of its love of baubles, by disappointed, and mean *secular*, though it was *ecclesiastical* ambition; when he was imbowered in his garden, at Welwyn, with his literary worthies about him; how insignificant must he have deemed those very men who had frustrated his sanguine expectations! How must a Walpole; a Pelham; nay even a Melcombe, have shrunk, in the just, and abstracted comparison!

If youth would but attend to *this* hum-

ble advice; to these candid remonstrances; which are unfeignedly meant for their good; they might anticipate a long life of health; of happiness; of true dignity, and honour. If their moral sentiments are not so strong as I could wish, let their *pride* plead the cause which I have been endeavouring to enforce. Let us, with whatever difficulty; with whatever conflict, assert *our own individual empire*. If we are *Lords of ourselves*, we shall never be *slaves to others*.

I trust that the fair sex will not refuse me *their* attention, while I address *them* with sincerity, and respect. The female mind is capable of the finest expansion, and embellishment; therefore, it should devote many hours to such reading as, at once affords the most intellectual improvement, and the most rational entertainment. It would be impertinent in *me*, particularly to point out to them this kind of reading. Their own good sense; their own delicacy of taste; if they will but exert them; and their learned friends, will select for them, from the immense multiplicity of publications, far better than *I* can. When I presumed to say so much



to ladies, I had in my eye, the vast inundation of modern novels; the disgrace of the press; the moral pestilence of the publick. The time which is prostituted to the reading of *them*, is *not* merely thrown away; it is prostituted to the worst effects; they not only foster a mental indolence; which is a very humiliating, and dangerous state; but stupid, and inartificial, as they *are*, in fable; character; and events; they are apt to take a fatal hold of the imagination; and to make their reader a victim to unguarded passion. They conspire with the destructive operation of luxury;—their vile scenes corrupt the heart; and their vile manner of writing corrupts the taste. Forsake, then, this baleful atmosphere; this poisoned Erebus of the fancy; and retire to the Elysian Fields of elegant, and polite literature; of luminous, and pathetick philosophy. Let not those invaluable, and immortal souls, ignobly; ignominiously, feed on garbage; who were born to feast on celestial nectar, and ambrosia; who were born to *quaff immortality, and joy!*

Consider, too, your interest, in the im-

proved influence of beauty; a cultivated understanding will suffuse, and animate, your charms, with *something than beauty dearer*; with the eloquent expression of intellectual graces; with emanations of sentiment, expanded, and refined. It will accelerate, and secure your conquests, with every man who is worthy of your attention, and affections.

Let us thank Heaven who made us capable of enjoying intellectual pleasures; and of feeling; of knowing them, to be our best pleasures. Nay, let us *thank*, as we are taught to *bless*, even our enemies. Let us thank disappointment; adversity; persecution; had it not been for *them*, we might have been continually agitated with false good, and with false evil; but if they permanently fix; if they rivet our main attention, to the superiour objects, to which it should be our strenuous endeavour; our warm ambition, to ascend; instead of being, *ultimately*, our enemies, they will be our kindest, and most beneficent friends: to *them* we shall be indebted for all the good of which they were industrious to deprive us: we shall

be indebted to them for the securest independence; for the richest affluence; *the independence of virtue; the affluence of the mind.*

was his longest  
poem

## LECTURE XII.

### THOMSON.

I SHALL now give my best attention to the works of Thomson: and if my view of those works shall be found to be, in any degree, worthy of them, it will certainly make not the least acceptable part of these Lectures. (Thomson was a great poet; but though inferiour to some, whose excellences I have endeavoured to display, perhaps he is read more, and makes deeper impressions in our minds than any one of our other poets.) For he paints the scenes of Nature which are most interesting, and affecting; to which we are most habituated; and to which we, therefore, most frequently recur; and he paints them with glowing colours; and with a choice, and assemblage of objects, by which he is eminently distinguished



above all other poets. Those who are not *properly* acquainted with Thomson (and they are the great majority of his readers) seem only to be sensible of his uncommon merit, as a descriptive poet. But certainly, in his moral strains, in which he often expands, and expatiates, he is entitled to our high esteem, and admiration. They speak distinctly, and forcibly to the understanding, and to the heart. They inculcate the most natural, and the noblest religion; they inculcate that warm, and universal philanthropy, which, from *such* a religion, is the necessary, and most beneficent deduction. Every image is presented to the fancy, which can excite humanity and compassion; all the poetical apparatus is displayed, and thrown into the most vigorous and beautiful action, that can make selfishness, and barbarity odious; that can deter us from incurring the guilt of those detestable crimes. Thomson, in his poetical theology, and morality, like a true poet, avoids all metaphysical reasoning; all abstracted, and complicated argument. Does he wish to inspire you with true religion; with a rational, yet ardent devotion? he leads

you, immediately, “ from Nature, up to  
“ Nature’s God.” He exhibits to you the  
magnificence; the beauty, and the har-  
mony of the universe;—the spring pours  
forth its luxuriant sweets; and the senses,  
and the imagination are delighted: the  
sea roars, and overflows its bounds; the  
thunder peals; the lightning flashes  
through the hemisphere; yet the crea-  
tures, and the order of creation are pre-  
served. Then, “ the heavens declare the  
 “ glory of God,” and “ the firmament  
 “ showeth” the stupendous works of the  
 Divine Artificer, in the luminous, and  
 emphatical language of our bard: the  
 celestial motions, and revolutions are re-  
 presented with a corresponding majesty,  
 by the vast, and splendid poetical orrery:  
 on *our* minds rushes the Supreme Mind;  
 the Deity; the Being of infinite power, and  
 wisdom; and of eternal existence.

(( So, in his morality; he does not in-  
 struct us with the *severity* of reasoning;  
 with the ingenious, but cold distinctions,  
 and subtleties of the schools.)) Inspired as  
he is, by the Muses; without any formal,  
and didactick process, he inflames you  
with a love of virtue, and with a hatred of

vice. With him, all is living, active, and dramatick. The offices of humanity take their figures; their colouring; and their passions: benevolent power, and its objects, are personified, in striking attitudes; and with pathetick features: tyrants frown; and their victims bleed before us, by the magical operation of numbers; these expressive scenes awake, and actuate those emotions, by which the sentiments that most adorn human nature, are agitated and refined. The solemn philosopher endeavours to take you by the siege of syllogism; and wins his way to your citadel of reason by slow approaches: the poet, with eagle-speed; through a tract of verdure, and of roses, assails your heart, and soul; you instantaneously yield to the rapidity, and brilliancy of his march; and your captivity is your pleasure.

/// The religious, and benevolent strains with which the poetry of Thomson is eminently characterized, flowed, all, from the sincerity, and ardour of his soul; they were, indeed, but so many transcripts of his habitual sentiments, and conduct. ///  
He was an enemy to all profaneness; to

every species of irreligion. Indeed, the mind of a poet is happily, and particularly formed to observe, and to admire all order; symmetry; harmony; beauty; and sublimity. It is formed to admire these objects; *not* in the cooler degree of good, yet *common* minds; but with the warmth of rapture; with the most exquisite delight. His moral practice, it is true, may not be so uniformly analogous to this theory, and to these feelings, as we might wish; for that very susceptible frame, which is so powerfully attracted to those worthy, and great objects, by which it is exalted, and refined, is likewise unfortunately liable to be allured to those inferior, but captivating objects, by which it is debased, and corrupted. How could a mind like Thomson's, go abroad, and take a view of the universe; how could it return home, and take a view of its own operations; without knowing, to demonstration, the existence, and providence of a God; and without most humbly, and devoutly adoring him? To throw our faculties into a sluggish, and putrid channel; to throw them into a substance, and direction, contrary to this pure and



vigorous flow; to be daily conversant with the works of the Deity, with a stupid, or profane indifference; to feel no religious impressions from their influence; or to affect to feel none; nay, to be industrious to propagate the monstrous nonsense of atheism; to laugh at the works of God, when we insist on their divine origin; and to sport with his name; this disposition, and these habitudes render any creature in human shape the most contemptible; the most abominable of beings.

Totally the contrast of this most hideous moral deformity, was our elegant, pathetick, and sublime poet. Every day, and night read *him* lectures of piety, which he imbibed, with a heart full of gratitude, and rapture. It was not only the “sun,” “who cometh forth from his “chamber, as a bridegroom, and” who “rejoiceth as a giant, to run his course;”—nor was it only “the moon;”—“rising “in clouded majesty;”—then, “apparent “queen, unveiling her peerless light; and “throwing her silver mantle o’er the “earth:”—it was not only *these* more energetical proclaimers of their Divine Authour that composed the mind of

Thomson to humility, and awe; or raised it to triumph, and exultation; with *these* sacred sentiments he was not less inspired by the elegant than by the grand objects of Nature: the whole system of creation was *his* vast, and splendid volume of divinity: *he* never could forget the oracles of celestial truth; they were breathed to him, at morn, by the rose, in fragrance; and at eve, by the nightingale, in musick.

I should suppose that nothing forms the mind of man more to true benevolence, and humanity, than a high enjoyment of what is good, in this life; and a long, and pungent experience of its evils. Of this severe, but salutary school, the poet seems particularly doomed to be a disciple, from his exquisite sensibility; and from his unequal, and iniquitous situations. Therefore, whatever may be, in general, the faults, or the vices of a poet; without any partiality to an extraordinary class of beings; I think we may venture to assert, that a poet would always be generous to those who needed his protection; if he was enabled by fortune to exercise his generosity. It is well known that Thomson was extremely affectionate to his re-

lations; and that his philanthropy was  
ardent; and as active as his circumstances  
would permit. His conversation was  
mild, and unassuming, like his love of  
man; he seldom showed anger, and in-  
digination, but when he heard some hor-  
rid tale of oppression, and barbarity.  
 Thus are his numbers doubly consecrated  
 to posterity; they were inspired by capital  
 genius; and considered as his moral the-  
 ory, they are a copy of his practice. We  
 may likewise observe; that vice is only  
 vice, in proportion to its bad effects; and  
 that human actions can only with pro-  
 priety be denominated virtuous; as they  
 promote the happiness of the individual,  
 and of mankind. But this private, and  
 publick happiness are promoted by no-  
 thing so much as by ardent, and active  
 benevolence; as they are most materially,  
 and extensively injured by the exercise  
 of a cruel, and tyrannical disposition.  
 One might think it superfluous, at this  
 period of literary discriminations, to ad-  
 vance this doctrine; to mark these dis-  
 tinctions; but it is the duty of every li-  
 beral writer never to quit his hold of  
 selfish hypocrisy, and superstition; *they*

will keep their ground as long as they *can*; as long as they *can*, they will substitute symbols, and words, for things; they will substitute that legerdemain, or magick, which cannot be kept in play without *them*, for disinterested, and noble conduct; or, in other terms, for genuine christianity.

Thomson, then, was a man of great virtue; he was a man of the highest virtue; for he was a man of universal benevolence, in sentiment, and in life. That, certainly, must be the most excellent virtue which makes us most resemble the Divine Nature: and what says Cicero?—  
 “Homines ad Deos nulla re propius  
 “accedunt quam salute in hominibus  
 “dando.”

It is indeed evident, from the vigour, and complexion of Thomson's writings, that he was humane, and beneficent. There is a pathos, and a language, by which you see the soul, and real character of the man. I know, we are every day told, that we must not presume to determine what the authour is, from his book; and the remark, if it is limited to general validity, is true. The morality of a lite-



rary work, and the morals of him by whom it was composed, are, too often, at an unfortunate, and melancholy variance: hence, the writer is commonly accused of hypocrisy. The accusation is unjust to *him*, and to the cause of virtue; which it deprives of a strong argument in its defence; of a seasonable tribute to its irresistible influence. We never at first, before the understanding is darkened by bad habits, become votaries to vice, from an injudicious choice. Passion prevails over reason; and thus we submit to the ignominious captivity. Yet virtue, even when she is deserted, naturally charms the human mind; she still charms the renegado, by whom she has been long deserted. These propositions will acquire a strength, in proportion to the strength of abilities of the man to whom they are applied. When a Bolingbroke, in his closet, free from all mean passions, and temptations, beautifully, and sublimely displays the heroick virtues which may be practised in exile; he is, during the auspicious hour, the good man; the noble-minded patriot whom he describes. He writes with a pure sincerity.

ty; with an unaffected fervour: the rectitude of his imagination condemns the habitual depravity of his will.

Yet in doctrines, and descriptions of this kind, fancy, and ingenuity are the predominant characteristicks. You have an elegant selection, and arrangement of words; you have the ardour, and the flow, and the energy of eloquence; for these words, and this eloquence, are the vehicles of that warmth with which a liberal mind; with which talents, in the prosecution of a noble subject, must necessarily be inflamed. Still, however, there are wanting those impressive, and indelible marks, those infallible criteria, by which the moral and practical sincerity of the writer is ascertained. The genius is evinced; but the man is not indubitable.

But both the substance, and the colouring of Thomson's poetry show that his life was animated, and directed, by those amiable, and God-like virtues which adorned, and dignified his verse. The heart, the soul is poured forth, in every line. You see an anxiety; a tenderness; an interest for the cause which

he pleads; which absorbs the whole man; and which are wanting in those literary works that are produced merely by the exertion of the understanding, and the imagination. As an advocate for the general weal, he is not only inspired by genius, but thrilled with a sympathy which penetrates the whole frame. The luxury of woe; a strong feeling for the human species,—at once, painful, desirable, and delightful, pours forth a simple, yet powerful, and victorious eloquence (victorious, at least, for the moment), which the schools never taught, and which the mere intellectual faculties never seized. He conjures you by our common nature; by our fraternal ties; by your own experience; by your own sufferings; he entreats you, with tears, to lose no opportunity of exerting humanity; to be the zealous, active, and indefatigable friends of mankind. So ingenuous, and ardent is our captivating advocate; he so unaffectedly “glows, and “trembles, while he writes;” that he is, then, evidently performing the divine office which he recommends. As an example of this invaluable species of eloquence, in which all the heart is engaged,



and which may easily be distinguished from that rhetorical eloquence, which, comparatively, is but artificial, and meretricious; permit me to refer you to a letter from Thomson to his sister, which you will find in Johnson's life of our poet: it was communicated to the Doctor by Mr. Boswell; but if it had been picked up in the street, its internal evidence amounts to such demonstration, that we could no more have doubted of its authenticity, than of the sincere, tender, and ardent affection, which moved, and guided the hand of the writer.

The strokes in writing, representing the mind of the person who drew them, produce the same effect with those in a masterly portrait; the work of a painter; which immediately assure us of a true likeness; of a striking resemblance to the original. In such a portrait, art hath emulated nature with so fortunate an ambition; the features bear with such an emphasis, on each other; the colours are so happily blended, and adjusted to those features; and the whole picture produces such a strength, and novelty of expression; amidst the infinite variety of human as-



pects, and characters; that we are certain that the artist hath done justice to the person who sat to his performance; a person, whom, perhaps, we have never seen.

I shall now beg leave to observe, that if it was in the power of the most exquisite writing; of the most exquisite poetry; to purify the human heart, and to reform the human conduct; if we could possibly be prevailed with to despise a false, glaring, and tawdry splendour; and to grow enamoured of the inimitable elegance; beauty; simplicity and sublimity of nature; if we could be soothed, at least, into some faint resemblance of the amiable Gentoos; into something like an aversion from barbarity; from persecuting, and murdering innocent, and beautiful animals, for our favourite entertainment; if we could be taught the practice of a rational and manly religion; at an equal distance from profaneness, and superstition; if we could make the abridgement of our own wants (an attainment as inestimable as it is rare; for it goes hand in hand with temperance; and it has health for its reward!)—if we could make the abridge-

ment of these wants, and the relief of the wants of others, the fixed, and invariable constituents of our happiness;—if *these* blessed effects could have been produced by human powers; after they have been preached by the celestial voice of Christ, for many centuries, in vain; they, would have been produced by the poetry of Thomson.

The vigour of Thomson's poetry is charged with frequently degenerating into bombast, by some criticks; and particularly by a Mr. John Scott; from whose pen we have an octavo volume of "Critical Essays on some of the poems of several English poets." I own that the authority of these Critical Essays is, with me, very insignificant. This writer would have had more pleasure, as a man conversant with poetry; and he would have done more justice to his great authours, if he had read their works with a warmer and uninterrupted admiration of their beauties; and with less frigid cavil on their faults; or rather on their trifling inaccuracies. Mr. Scott was an acquaintance of Dr. Johnson; whom illness and death prevented from writing his life;

but it was afterwards very well written by Mr. Hoole; an elegant, and respectable authour; in whom it would be cynical, not only not to pardon, but not to love, the amiable partiality of the friend.

That force which almost always bears the poetry of Thomson powerfully along, is, if I may use the expression, as generally enforced by perspicuity, and simplicity. Here, he far excells Young; who frequently excells *him*, in the sublime; which is the utmost degree of poetical excellence. Young is too often inattentive to clearness; which, in poetry, is an indispensable requisite. We have to contend with an involution of sense, and language, when we should be borne on the ardour, and rapidity of genius, of which *he* was a most eminent master; though they sometimes unfortunately mount him beyond the regions of judgement, and of taste. The muse of Thomson throws not such impediments in our way; nor can I recollect, or find one instance of her towering to the bombast; of her invading of those heights that suppress poetical respiration. He never transgresses, from that strength, eleva-



tion, and glow of thought, and language,  
which characterize poetry; which distin-  
guish it from common thinking, and  
writing; he never transgresses, from his  
pure, and genuine fire, to that injudici-  
ous desertion of nature; to that wild ex-  
travagance of sentiment; to those gigan-  
tick, and monstrous images; and to the  
congenial inflated, and pompous language,  
which constitute bombast; or the false  
sublime.

I do not, indeed, think that the sublime, with all its vigour, and electrical effect, is a characteristick of Thomson, as a poet. The tender; the benevolent; the naturally, and poetically pious; the descriptive; the picturesque; the personification of the passions; and of other striking, though inanimate objects; are his leading, and ruling characteristicks. I am far from meaning to say, that he is incapable of the sublime; nay, he frequently attains it; but it is a sublime of a certain, and secondary species; not of the astonishing; unparalleled Miltonian impetus, and grandeur. I will endeavour to explain myself with more accuracy, and distinction. Thomson is sublime,



by presenting to us magnificent, but well-known images, with a noble arrangement, and language; rather than by transporting us with original sublimity of thought; and with images, which he himself hath invented, or aggrandized. A quotation from Thomson, and another from Milton; while they evidently show, will justify my distinction. I shall here beg leave to recite some verses, which I take from the hymn, at the end of the Seasons; a hymn which has all the merit that beautiful, and great imagery, beautifully, and greatly expressed, can give it.

In Winter, awful Thou ; with clouds, and storms  
Around Thee thrown ; tempest o'er tempest rolled ;  
Majestick darkness, on the whirlwind's wing,  
Riding sublime ; Thou bid'st the world adore ;  
And humblest Nature with Thy northern blast !

V. 16th.

The following lines, too, are of similar excellence to those which I have just quoted :

Ye softer floods that lead the humid maze  
Along the vale ; and thou, majestick main,  
A secret world of wonders, in thyself,  
Sound His stupendous praise ; whose greater voice  
Or bids you roar, or bids your roarings fall.

V. 51st.

From this justly celebrated hymn I shall give you one extract more; in which the grand images are happily connected; and expressed with energy.

Great source of day; best image, here below,  
Of thy Creator! ever pouring wide,  
From world to world, the vital ocean round,  
On Nature write, with every beam, *His* praise!  
The thunder rolls! be hushed, the prostrate world;  
While cloud to cloud returns the solemn hymn!

V. 66th.

In these passages, we have certainly the sublime; but it is principally effected by the objects which are presented to us; it owes little to the masterly art; to the more fervid inspiration; to the bold, and creative genius of the poet.

I have said much on Milton; I wish that the justness of my observations on that unrivalled poet may, in *some* degree, warrant their number! my quotations from him, now, shall, therefore, be concise: nor shall my remarks on those quotations be tedious. The true sublime, however; the peculiar sublimity of Milton, will be evidently displayed. Toward the close of the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*, when the phalanx of the angel,

Gabriel, began to *hem* Satan round with ported spears; the stature, spirit, and dignity of the infernal hero, are thus described:

———On the other side, Satan alarmed,  
Collecting all his might, dilated stood,  
Like Teneriff, or Atlas, unremoved;  
His stature reached the sky; and on his crest  
Sat horror plumed!

B. IVth. V. 98.

Near the end of the sixth book of that divine poem, the Messiah rushes on, to attack the hosts of Pandæmonium, in the following terrifick majesty:

He, on his impious foes right onward drove;  
Gloomy as night; under his burning wheels  
The stedfast Empyrean shook throughout;  
All, but the throne itself of God!

B. VIth. V. 831.

A concurrence of new, vast, awful, and tremendous objects, sent home, to the soul, with a force, and ardour of sentiment, and language, which are worthy of them, conspire to work up the passages which I have now quoted, to as high a sublimity as it is possible for the mind of

man to conceive. By the very alarm, which Satan felt, at first ; the immediately subsequent, and glorious throw of intrepidity ; the collected fortitude, and firmness, with which he stood resolute against his foes, are aggrandized, to our imagination. The stature, and ornaments of the subterranean chief ; the immense objects of similitude which are applied to him ; all mark the vast, and unbounded mind, by which they were produced. In the second quotation, by the gloomy terrour, with which the Messiah moves to battle ; by the shaking of the stedfast Empyrean, through its unlimited extent ; and by the exception, and contrast, of this trembling of the heavens, in the eternal immobility of the throne of God ; the poet still expands, and rises, in his infinite sublimity. There is a peculiar art ; or rather a peculiar divine *afflatus*, in the poetry of Milton ; he is fired with his own pictures ; therefore they are sure to fire his readers. But as he proceeds to paint, his mental forms grow too vivid, and too expanded for his pencil ; they take too much of the fervour, and immensity of his mind, to admit of representation. From what he



*has* expressed, he sees, with the eye of fancy, what he has left unexpressed; what is not *turned* to actual *shape*, by the *pen* of the *poet*; what is too great, or too fine for expression: his imagination enjoys all its play, and its luxury; it rejoices, and triumphs in the pursuit of the fleeting meteor; in throwing it, with varied sallies, into something like a *form*, and *pressure*. The susceptible reader catches the mental vivacity, activity, and expansion of the poet; he participates his agitation; his invention, and his rapture.

Thomson, in whatever light we view him, as a poet, has the great merit of originality. The grand, and the delightful scenes of nature are particularly formed to attract, and charm a poetical imagination; therefore, they have been the favourite themes of poets of all ages. Yet the descriptions of these scenes, in the Seasons of Thomson, and in his other works, are his own: as a descriptive poet, indeed; or, as a painter of rural objects, he has not his equal. His scenery is evidently grouped, and executed, from his own observations; so interesting; so striking; so much to the life, are the

forms; the colours; the arrangement,  
and the effect of the whole. His morality,  
 and his piety, too, have their novelty;  
their peculiar beauty, and dignity: he  
unfolds, and urges them, with the most  
persuasive topicks; with a tender, yet  
subduing force; he pleads the cause of  
his distressed neighbour; and of his inde-  
pendent, eternal, omnipotent, and bene-  
ficent God, with an irresistible stream of  
the pathetick; with a captivating luxury  
of poetical eloquence, unknown before.

Style is the copy of thought; therefore,  
 as our substance, and manner of thinking  
*are*, such will our words, and such will  
 their order *be*. The language, like the  
sentiments of Thomson, has an essence,  
and a structure, by which it is prominent-  
ly discriminated from the styles of other  
poets. The style of *his* poetry is almost  
 constantly impressive; and his epithets  
are often as happily applied to their ob-  
jects as they are new. His numbers, in  
 general, flow with an exuberance, and  
 harmony, responsive to the exquisite sen-  
 sibility, and warmth of the soul of their  
 authour; their modulation, however,  
 has its peculiarity; the musick of their so-

norous march is sometimes interrupted by a stiffness, and ruggedness of idiom; by words unnaturally, and harshly compounded; and by other uncouth, hard, and abrupt words, closing a line, or a paragraph. Sense, force, and expression, ought, undoubtedly, to be ruling objects with a poet; but even for *their* sakes, he should not sacrifice elegance, and harmony of diction: whenever he *does*, he departs from the character of a poet: when he connects; when he blends all these objects, amicably, and *con amore*, he achieves the duty of a true, and great poet.

Thomson has been accused by respectable criticks of sometimes dwelling too long on his immediate subject. I speak with deference to their opinion; but on that subject he never dwells too long for me: for in reading his works, and particularly his Seasons, my mind is kept, throughout, in a lively, strong, and pleasurable current; without a moment's dead stagnation; without a moment's languour. But if he *is*, sometimes redundant, it is not the redundancy of antithesis, and conceit; it is not a puerile, Ovidian redundancy: in his excess, there is still a strength,



and variety; an additional fine light, or shade of colouring: it is the excess of a blooming, and luxuriant tree; an excess that you would prune with regret. In this part of my Lecture, it will not be improper to introduce a passage or two from Johnson's critical remarks on our poet. I am the more inclined to think favourably of some of my own sentiments on the poetry of Thomson, that they coincide with those of that great man.

“ As a writer (says Johnson) he is  
 “ entitled to one praise of the highest  
 “ kind; his mode of thinking, and of ex-  
*Johnson* “ pressing his thoughts, is original. His  
 “ blank verse is no more the blank verse  
 “ of Milton, or of any other poet, than  
 “ the rhymes of Prior are the rhymes of  
 “ Cowley. His numbers; his pauses; his  
 “ diction; are of his own growth; without  
 “ transcription; without imitation. He  
 “ thinks in a peculiar train; and he thinks  
 “ always as a man of genius: he looks  
 “ round on nature, and on life, with the  
 “ eye which Nature bestows only on a  
 “ poet; the eye that distinguishes, in every  
 “ thing presented to its view, whatever  
 “ there is, on which imagination can de-



“light to be detained; and a mind that,  
 “at once, comprehends the vast, and at-  
 “tends to the minute. The reader of the  
 “Seasons wonders that he never saw  
 “before what Thomson shows him;  
 “and that he never yet has felt what  
 “Thomson impresses.” \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \*  
 “His diction is, in the highest degree,  
 “florid, and luxuriant; such as may be  
 “said to be, to his images, and thoughts,  
 “both their lustre, and their shade; such  
 “as invests them with splendour; through  
 “which, perhaps, they are not always  
 “easily discerned. It is too exuberant;  
 “and sometimes may be charged with  
 “filling the ear more than the mind.”—  
 Life of Thomson: Vol. VIth. pages 235;  
 236.

Of the justice of the last charge, I cannot say that I am satisfied. That the style  
of Thomson is florid, splendid, and exu-  
berant, every reader of the least discernment must acknowledge: but I do not remember to have ever felt that it was unsubstantial, or obscure. Surely, if perspicuity, and an uninterrupted tenour of interesting sentiment, are characteristicks

of any poet, they are characteristics of him whom I have now in view.

Alluding to the Seasons—"His is one  
 "of the works" (observes our critick) "in  
 "which blank verse seems properly used.  
 "Thomson's wide expansion of general  
 "views; and his enumeration of circum-  
 "stantial varieties, would have been ob-  
 "structed, and embarrassed, by the fre-  
 "quent intersections of the sense; which  
 "are the necessary effects of rhyme."—

Page 235.

This is certainly a curious observation; if we recollect all the contemptuous remarks which have been thrown out by Johnson against blank verse. But they, who are determined, at all hazards, to espouse, and defend a bad cause, are very apt to fall into palpable inconsistencies. If "blank verse is only verse to the eye," how could Thomson rank so high, as a poet, in Johnson's estimation; for certainly true, and generous verse is an essential constituent of excellent poetry? But if blank verse is *properly* applied to Thomson's "wide expansion of general views;" and his "enumeration of circumstantial varieties;" or, in other words; in the

words of Johnson's Imlac; in his Prince of Abyssinia; to "all that is awfully great, "or elegantly little;" (for the objects of the Seasons take no less a range;) if blank verse is applied with a peculiar propriety; if it is applied with more propriety than rhyme, to so vast a region; and to such various, and contrasted images; our great critick, then, in spite of himself; and apparently unconscious of a plain, and inevitable consequence, gives the absolute palm to blank verse, when he has brought blank verse, and rhyme directly into competition.

But the preference of the one species of versification to the other, is more a matter of fancy, and of individual taste, than of decisive judgement, and of immutable truth. Hence, the preference is as little to be claimed, when any particular subject of the poet is in question. Neither general nor specifick objects should determine the poet to the use of either kind of verse; he should be determined only by his own genius; by that mode of versification, in which, he must be sensible, by experience, that Nature meant that he should excell. I would not be so repeat-

edly tenacious of this theory, if it was not demonstrated to me by the annals of English poetry. And if any thing could invalidate this theory; if any thing could annihilate its force; (I mean, with my own private judgement; while I entertain a proper respect for the differing judgement of others) if any thing could induce me universally to recommend the adoption of blank verse to the poets of the rising generation; it would be the very great advantage which is attributed to it by Johnson; in the passage which I have just quoted; that of leaving the thoughts; the sallies; the fire of the poet, more uncircumscribed, and free.

I am afraid that in the course of these Lectures I have too often wished for your attention to my defence of blank verse. The defence of it, from *me*, must be impartial. I am a great admirer of Pope; therefore I must be a great admirer of excellent rhyme. I was, however, particularly desirous that blank verse should have its merit, in your esteem; for two reasons; I was solicitous to remove the prejudices against it which so great an authority as Dr. Johnson's might have



fixed in your minds; and I have been industrious to restore that species of versification to its proper value, which is essential to the sublimest poetry in the world; to the poetry of *Milton*. But I am apprehensive that in the lapse of a few years, in which melancholy, perhaps, hath sometimes invaded more lively, and encouraging ideas, I may have been guilty of tautology; without diversifying my reasoning, and my topicks, I may frequently have recurred to the same subject. I have not, however, willingly, or consciously, exactly *re-traversed* the same ground; and mere failures of memory, liberality, and humanity will be eager to excuse. I very sensibly feel that faculty decline in me; but the very failure is a salutary memento; it reminds me of my age; it reminds me that the time is approaching, when my heart will vibrate to the strains of poetry no more; when it will be cold, and insensible to the pathos of Thomson, and to the sublime of Milton.

Though we must be convinced that Thomson was a great poet, by whatever he has written, his master-pieces are unquestionably his Seasons. The happy

choice of a subject is as much a proof of  
the poet's judgement, and taste, as it is  
propitious to his poetical success. The  
different seasons present objects which  
are most interesting to our feelings; to  
our discursive faculties; to the best pow-  
ers of the mind; objects, whose return  
always affords a rational, and a new plea-  
sure; a delightful veneration of their first  
cause; if, fortunately for the true, and  
full enjoyment of our existence, we are  
under the salutary dominion of virtue; or  
if we are yet sensible, and alive to her im-  
pressions. These objects were never  
painted so justly; so completely; with  
such striking forms, and in such glowing  
colours, as they are by Thomson; and  
they are likewise adorned, and dignified  
with the humane, the moral, the religious  
sentiments, which they naturally excite:  
with a copious, and splendid eloquence;  
with peculiar force, and beauty. We  
need not therefore, be surprized, that the  
Seasons are as much read, and remem-  
bered, as any poems in the English, or in  
any other language. It is not incumbent  
on me to say much more of these beauti-  
ful productions, for two reasons, their

excellence is thoroughly felt, and known,  
by every person of reading, and taste; and  
 it has been strongly enforced by what I  
 have already quoted from Dr. Johnson;  
 and by what I shall now beg leave to  
 transcribe.

“ His descriptions of extended scenes,  
 “ and general effects,” (says our cele-  
 brated critick) “ bring before us the whole  
 “ magnificence of Nature, whether pleas-  
 “ ing or dreadful. The gaiety of spring;  
 “ the splendour of summer; the tranquil-  
 “ lity of autumn; and the horror of win-  
 “ ter, take, in their turns, possession of  
 “ the mind. The poet leads us through  
 “ the appearances of things, as they are  
 “ successively varied by the vicissitudes of  
 “ the year; and imparts to us so much of  
 “ his own enthusiasm, that our thoughts  
 “ expand with *his* imagery, and kindle  
 “ with *his* sentiments. Nor is the natu-  
 “ ralist without *his* part in the entertain-  
 “ ment; for he is assisted to recollect, and  
 “ to combine; to range his discoveries;  
 “ and to amplify the sphere of his con-  
 “ templation.”—Pages 235, 236.

This is just, and generous, and poetical  
 criticism. With the next paragraph I

am not so well satisfied.—“ These poems” (continues our authour) “ with which I “ was acquainted at their first appearance, “ I have since found altered, and enlarged, by subsequent revisals; as the “ authour supposed his judgement to “ grow more exact; and as books, or conversation extended his knowledge, and “ opened his prospects. They are, I “ think, improved, in general; yet I know “ not whether they have not lost part of “ what Temple calls their *race*; a word, “ which, applied to wines, in its primitive “ sense, means, the flavour of the soil.”—P. 236.

A poem must always be greatly improved by the future serious, and strenuous attention of its authour; if he possesses the genius, and the judgement of Thomson. Consequently, the latter part of this passage is the result of the fastidiousness of the moment; of a false delicacy; of a fancied refinement on critical observation; in short, of a little triumph (inferiour to the triumphs of which *Johnson* should have been ambitious) in having started a new, pretty, quaint simile.

Though I have observed that it was not



necessary for *me* to be at all diffuse in my remarks on the Seasons; yet on reviewing some notes, which, in the year 1793, I was engaged to write by a bookseller, who was then publishing an edition of those poems, I flatter myself that you will not think an extract or two from them altogether superfluous, or uninteresting. Permit me to give you the first general note; or preliminary view of the authour.

“ Perhaps no poems have been read  
 “ more generally, or with more pleasure  
 “ than the Seasons of Thomson. This  
 “ was a natural consequence of the ob-  
 “ jects which they present, and of the  
 “ genius which they display. In descrip-  
 “ tive poetry, or as a poetical painter, I  
 “ do not know an equal to Thomson.  
 “ The pictures of other poets, compara-  
 “ tively with *his*, often want precision;  
 “ colour, and expression; because they  
 “ are more copies from books than origi-  
 “ nals; rather secondary descriptions,  
 “ than transcripts made immediately  
 “ from the living volume of Nature.  
 “ With her Thomson was intimately ac-  
 “ quainted; and as his judgement, and  
 “ his taste were equal to his diligent ob-

“ servation, the whole groupe of objects,  
 “ in *his* descriptions, is always peculiarly  
 “ striking, or affecting; from their natu-  
 “ ral, and happy relation to one another.  
 “ Hence, peculiarly in *this* poet, a little  
 “ natural object, apparently insignificant,  
 “ of itself, takes consequence from its  
 “ association to others, and very much  
 “ heightens, or enforces the awful, or  
 “ beautiful assemblage. Thomson’s poe-  
 “ try is still more nobly recommended to  
 “ his readers by a most amiable morality,  
 “ and religion; the painter, and the sage  
 “ are very fortunate auxiliaries to each  
 “ other. The structure of his verse is  
 “ characteristically his own: true genius  
 “ disdains all mechanical, and servile imi-  
 “ tation: that verse is always perspicuous;  
 “ energetick; fully, and clearly expressive  
 “ of his ideas; not so easy, always, and  
 “ flowing in its close, as we could wish.  
 “ The favourite objects of his mind did  
 “ not captivate his imagination alone;  
 “ they actuated, and marked his manners,  
 “ and his life. He was a most benevolent,  
 “ as well as a great man. He was a poet  
 “ of the first class; he was an honour to  
 “ Scotland; to Europe; to mankind.”

From my notes on Summer I shall beg leave to give you rather a large extract. It will contribute, I hope, in some degree, to illustrate, and enforce his poetical merit; and to vindicate him from groundless, and hypercritical censure. And when I consider the unfortunate ground on which I have stood, in the republick of letters, and in the world, I think it proper once more to assure you, that whatever plain,\* and downright language I may have used, or *shall* use, in the course of these Lectures, proceeds from my zeal for literary justice; for the memory of departed greatness; not from the least incitement of mean envy; or of meaner personal resentment. I will not be so ungrateful to the liberality of manners which you have already shown me, as to apprehend the unfavourable reception of this declaration; if you honour it with your belief, you will be the better prepared to agree with me, that the gross errors; the mere assertions; the *sic volo; sic jubeo*;—the *stet pro ratione voluntas*, of a celebrated, but imperious authority, should be combated, and subdued, with an opposition, and refutation, particu-

larly unequivocal, direct, and explicit; for our judgement is apt to be “ravished with the whistling of a name;” and powerful prejudices are only successfully opposed; they are only decisively conquered, by honest, and unreserved argument; by just, and strong expressions. He is not worthy to defend elegant, or moral truth, who sacrifices a particle of it to false delicacy; to disingenuous complaisance.

I shall now quote some observations which I have prefixed to my notes on particular passages of Thomson’s *Summer*.

“Among the many futile, absurd, and ungenerous passages in Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*, is the following remark on the Seasons. ‘The great defect of the Seasons is want of method; but for this, I know not that there was any remedy. (Of many appearances subsisting all at once, no rule can be given why one should be mentioned before another; yet the memory wants the help of order; and the curiosity is not excited by suspense, or expectation.’ I must beg leave to assert that what I have now quoted is absolute



“ nonsense. Therefore, as it is not en-  
 “ titled to a particular refutation, let it be  
 “ refuted by the poem which now engages  
 “ my attention; and which is longer by  
 “ several hundred lines than the other  
 “ seasons. It has all the order, and me-  
 “ thod that any sensible, and liberal cri-  
 “ tick; that any reader, except a dry, for-  
 “ mal pedant, could wish. The poet sur-  
 “ veys, paints, and enforces, with a glow-  
 “ ing, and animated pencil; with an af-  
 “ fecting, and sublime morality, and  
 “ religion, a summer's morning; noon;  
 “ evening; and night; as they succeed  
 “ one another, in the course of nature;  
 “ (for surely the *many appearances*, in  
 “ *any* season, do not *subsist all at once*.)  
 “ —If *this* is not method, I know not  
 “ what *is*. The most admired poems  
 “ have their episodes, which by no means  
 “ destroy, or confuse, the order of the  
 “ principal fable. His description of  
 “ noon is expanded with an interesting  
 “ picture of the torrid zone, to which he  
 “ devotes 460 lines. The rich, and ardent  
 “ colouring of this picture is congenial  
 “ with the climate which it represents.

“ If these lines are a digression, they are  
 “ naturally connected with the main  
 “ subject; they never lose sight of it;  
 “ therefore they keep it continually in the  
 “ mind of the reader. For his moral, and  
 “ pious apostrophes, originating from his  
 “ immediate objects; for his charming  
 “ episodes, derived from the same sources;  
 “ he cannot be reasonably taxed with a  
 “ neglect of regularity. To point out the  
 “ particular beauties of his *Celadon and*  
 “ *Amelia*; of his *Damon and Musidora*,  
 “ would be to affront the good sense, and  
 “ good sentiments of my readers. They  
 “ are beautiful tributes to virtue; to piety;  
 “ to our best affections. *They* alone  
 “ evince the falsehood, and the folly of  
 “ another strange observation of our ar-  
 “ bitrary critick;—‘ That it does not ap-  
 “ pear that he had much sense of the  
 “ ‘ pathetick.’ The person who wrote  
 “ this of Thomson, must either have lost  
 “ all remembrance of his authour, when  
 “ he wrote it; or his own mind must have  
 “ been ill adapted to sympathize with  
 “ pathetick writing. The pathetick is  
 “ one of the leading characteristicks of

“ the Seasons; it inspired the numbers,  
 “ and the life of this great Caledonian  
 “ poet.           \*           \*           \*           \*           \*

\*           \*           \*

“ After having described summer, and  
 “ its effects, in *our* fortunate island, he,  
 “ very forcibly, and I think, with great  
 “ regularity, expatiates on those inesti-  
 “ mable blessings which are peculiarly  
 “ enjoyed by the inhabitants of Britain.  
 “ He then pays his tribute of judiciously  
 “ distinguished eulogy (and certainly with  
 “ no incoherent deviation from his ruling  
 “ objects) to those illustrious characters,  
 “ who have distinguished, and elevated 2  
 “ the annals of this country; and he  
 “ closes the season with a peroration to  
 “ philosophy; the noble instructor, and  
 “ guide of life; a peroration which is cha-  
 “ racterized with elegance, and with a fine  
 “ enthusiasm. All this I beg leave to call  
 “ regularity, and a beautiful method.

“ What our formidable critick means  
 “ by telling us that—‘ In reading the  
 “ ‘ Seasons, memory wants the help of  
 “ ‘ order; and the curiosity is not excited  
 “ ‘ by suspense, or expectation;’—it is  
 “ difficult to say. It is so unsubstantial,

“ and random a censure, that it may be  
 “ applied, with equal propriety, to the  
 “ best poem of Virgil, or of Pope. To  
 “ excite that eager, and anxious curiosity,  
 “ suspense, and expectation, which it is  
 “ incumbent on the writer of a novel, or  
 “ of a drama, to raise, did not enter into  
 “ the plan of the Seasons; yet in reading  
 “ them, every mind that has a genuine  
 “ taste for poetry, is always warmly in-  
 “ terested, and affected, as it goes along;  
 “ it proceeds with a delightful expecta-  
 “ tion; for it expects to meet with most  
 “ excellent poetry; and it is never disap-  
 “ pointed; with poetry which flows in a  
 “ natural, and easy succession of senti-  
 “ ments, and imagery. By Thomson—  
 “ *lecta potenter erat res; therefore, nec*  
 “ *facundia deserit hunc, nec lucidus*  
 “ *ordo.*—Horace’s Art of Poetry, V. 40.

“ According to the edict of Johnson,—  
 “ “ The diction of Thomson is too exube-  
 “ “ rant; and sometimes may be charged  
 “ “ with filling the ear more than the  
 “ “ mind.’ I should be sorry to lose a  
 “ single expression of that most amiable,  
 “ and immortal poet. There is not a  
 “ feeble, not a superfluous word, in the



“ Seasons; not a word which does not  
 “ contribute to inform the mind; to en-  
 “ rich the fancy; or to improve the  
 “ heart.”

I fear that after my best endeavours, I am very remote from accuracy, and consistency; and that I in vain aspire to that symmetry of plan, and of ideas, of which we have complete examples in my great masters in the art of composition; and which I should wish, myself, to combine. In consequence of looking into my notes on the beautiful poems of the Seasons, I have *now* been more diffuse on them than I at first intended. The transcendent, and singular merit of those poems; the warm, and durable interest which they secure in the heart, and mind; will, I am persuaded, prevail with you to excuse me for surveying them with deliberate, and repeated attention; and for patiently extracting the poisoned shafts with which their fame hath been wounded. They will be read with a most lively pleasure by susceptible souls, while human nature is continued; if the English language is known so long. They are adapted, with a peculiar poetical felicity, to engage, and to charm feeling

minds, of all habits, and in all circumstances; to delight the fancy that is enamoured of rural scenes, to soothe, or to transport, the lover; to inflame laudable ambition; to console, and fortify the distressed; and to exalt, and govern, successful virtue.

I make my observations on his works, in the order in which they are printed. His poem to the memory of Sir Isaac Newton is worthy of the good; the great; the astonishing man, to whose glory it is consecrated. In this poem, the severer truths of science are worked into attractive, and beautiful pictures, by the genius of the poet: the mind is forcibly stimulated to intellectual achievements; the sublimity of the poetry rises to heights collateral with the sublimity of the Newtonian philosophy; and we are as warmly inspired with reverence for the virtues that amiably characterized his life, as with admiration of the powers that supereminently distinguished his mind.

The poem of *Britannia*, too, flows in the humane, generous, patriotick strains, which predominate in the poetry of Thomson; which give it a soft; insinuat-

ing; pathetick force; or a noble; ardent; and commanding vigour. In this poem, our empire of the sea, which I hope that we shall ever maintain, is asserted with all the flaming spirit of poetical eloquence. Peace, too, has all the honours which it could receive from a benevolent soul, and from a lover of the fine arts: luxury is deprecated; and its corruptions of the mind are justly, and forcibly displayed. With this temperate and sage morality, his extravagant eulogy on commerce is not very consistent. I have already taken the liberty to censure *Young* for making commerce the large, and elaborate theme of his encomium. I have no doubt that there are many commercial persons whom I should esteem, and respect, if I knew them; such persons will pardon one who has long weaned himself from all imitative, and servile attachment to the world; from all ambition for *common* popularity; for common fame; such persons will pardon me for speaking my real, but unembittered sentiments on great national objects; for viewing them through an abstracted; and through a poetical, and Arcadian medium; for I am

satisfied that *thus* to view them, is to view them in a just, moral, and virtuous light. It is very worthy of a modern statesman, with *his* absurd ideas of what constitutes the wealth, and strength, and happiness of a people; it is very worthy of a member for Liverpool, or Bristol, to labour, and harangue for commerce, at all events: but the mind of a poet, as Nature forms it, is particularly formed for the ardent practice of benevolence, and of all virtue; *however* it may act beneath its constitution, by too great a commixture of extreme sensibility with an alluring, and corrupted world. Therefore, to plead the cause of commerce, was very unworthy of those poets, whose numbers are fraught with the most humane, and generous morality; and whose lives were as amiable as their numbers. For commerce, especially when it hath risen to its last, its fatal improvements, hath always effected what was its natural, its necessary tendency, to effect; it hath diffused luxury, with all its baleful refinements, over an unfortunate, and devoted land. For it is the very energy of luxury, to enfeeble the body, and the soul; to



vitiate the taste; to emasculate the talents of a nation; to eradicate humanity; and indeed, all publick virtue.

For his adulation, in his *Britannia*, to the reigning family, let the motive of gratitude excuse him; a sentiment which operates with a peculiar force, in a susceptible mind. Frederick, Prince of Wales, a friend of good, and great men, had rewarded Thomson's merit, and had honoured him with his personal attention.

His poem of *Liberty*, in five parts; his longest poem, if we except the *Seasons*, comes now under my consideration. He wrote it, after he had travelled on the Continent; where his love of the English Constitution must have been much augmented by the many ocular examples that were presented to him, of the bad effects of superstitious, and arbitrary government, in the different states which he visited. On this poem, I find, in my last literary memoranda, that I have these remarks.—“ Liberty is, on the whole, a very  
 “ noble poem; fraught with interesting  
 “ poetical history, which exhibits the  
 “ causes, and consequences of liberty, and

“slavery. It abounds, too, with magnificent imagery.” By a subsequent part, however, of this account of the poem, I find that I have esteemed it more highly when I lately read it, than I did, some years ago. Yet the impressions which the two perusals gave me, will be found not to have been absolutely inconsistent with each other. For I cannot better give what is essentially my opinion of the poem of Liberty, at large; nor can I better answer the illiberal misrepresentations which it hath suffered from our great critick, than by transcribing a passage or two from my notes to the Seasons, which I have already quoted. “ ‘Thomson’s “ ‘poem of Liberty’ (says Dr. Johnson, in his life of our poet,) “ ‘when it first “ ‘appeared, I tried to read; and soon “ ‘desisted. I have never tried again; “ ‘and therefore will not hazard either “ ‘praise or censure.’ ”.—Pages 236, 237. Murphy’s edition.

This crude, and superficial stricture is a kind of critical corollary to some equally trifling propositions which he had thrown out, on this poem, in a preceding part of his life of Thomson.

“ As *Liberty* was written by the authour  
 “ of the Seasons, I am persuaded that the  
 “ reader will easily forgive me for offering  
 “ him, here, some remarks on its merit,  
 “ and on the fastidious manner in which  
 “ it was treated by Dr. Johnson. Most  
 “ poets have their conspicuous master-  
 “ piece; and the Seasons are Thomson’s,  
 “ beyond all controversy. The spirit,  
 “ and style with which a poem is executed,  
 “ depends greatly on the judgement, and  
 “ taste, with which its fable is chosen,  
 “ and arranged. The plan of *Liberty*,  
 “ which, unfortunately, is minutely, and  
 “ circumstantially historical, spreads a  
 “ damp, and a languor through several  
 “ parts of the poem. I must likewise ac-  
 “ knowledge that the composition of its  
 “ language often wants the perspicuity of  
 “ the authour of the Seasons. It is, how-  
 “ ever, as often marked with the manner  
 “ of a great master; and it hath several  
 “ passages which are completely worthy  
 “ of the poet by whom they were written.  
 “ It may seem surprizing that a *lexico-*  
 “ *grapher* had not patience to peruse the  
 “ poem of *Liberty*. He, who, one day,  
 “ told the authour of these notes that he

“ liked *muddling* work (*that* was his expression.)—For the disgust, however, which this unfortunate poem soon gave him, I can easily account to those who are at all acquainted with his real habits, and character.

“ With all his atchievements in the republick of letters, he gave way to long intervals of the most unmanly, and torpid indolence. This indolence prevented him from being properly acquainted with several books which are carefully perused by every man who deserves the title of a scholar. I was not a little surprized when he told me that he had only read parts of my Lord Clarendon’s History. If he recoiled from a history which is written with great genius, and strongly in favour of towering prerogative; we need not wonder that he was violently repelled from a poem which is fraught with encomiums on *equal* liberty. For, the other reason, undoubtedly, why he so soon desisted, after he had begun to read that poem, was his prejudiced, and ungenerous dislike of the glorious subject: he treats the very word, *liberty*, which,



“ properly understood, comprehends eve-  
 “ ry thing that is dear to man, with an  
 “ indecent, and *contemptible contempt*, in  
 “ his Lives of the Poets, and in several of  
 “ his other works. The well-proporti-  
 “ oned, and fair fabrick of our constitu-  
 “ tion, is half-way between the star-  
 “ chamber of Samuel Johnson, and the  
 “ tap-room of Thomas Paine.

“ There are several very fine passages in  
 “ the poem of Liberty. But Johnson, as  
 “ I have already observed, disliked the  
 “ subject. Surely, a poem which is  
 “ adorned with the following imagery,  
 “ and language, might have been perused  
 “ by one, whose talents were too often  
 “ obliged to submit to works of mere in-  
 “ dustry, and labour. Liberty thus de-  
 “ scribes the Genius of the Deep; whom  
 “ she met, as she was advancing toward  
 “ Britain; after she had left the more  
 “ northern nations:

.....As o'er the wave-resounding deep;  
 To my near reign, the happy isle I steered,  
 With easy wing; behold, from surge to surge,  
 Stalked the tremendous Genius of the Deep!  
 Around him clouds, in mingled tempest, hung:  
 Thick-flashing meteors crowned his starry head;  
 And ready thunder reddened in his hand;

As from it streamed compressed, the glowing cloud.  
 Where'er he looked, the trembling waves recoiled;  
 He needs but strike the conscious flood, and shook,  
 From shoar to shoar, in agitation dire,  
 It works his dreadful will. To me, his voice,  
 Like that hoarse blast that round the cavern howls,  
 Mixed with the murmurs of the falling main,  
 Addressed, began.....

Liberty ; Part 4th. V. 293.

I shall take my leave of this poem, by extracting from its fourth part, a fine encomium on our limited monarchy, and on our laws. We might naturally suppose that a whole composition, in which there are many splendid passages, might have been read, at least, with patience, and perseverance, by the greatest poet; by the most fastidious critick.

..... Thrice happy ; did they know  
 Their happiness, Britannia's bounded Kings !  
 What, though not *theirs* the boast, in dungeon-glooms  
 To plunge bold Freedom; or to cheerless wilds  
 To drive him from the cordial face of friend;  
 Or fierce to strike him at the midnight-hour,  
 By mandate blind; not justice that delights  
 To dare the keenest eye of open day.  
 What though no glory to controul the laws,  
 And make injurious will their only rule,  
*They* deem it! what; though tools of wanton power;  
 Pestiferous armies swarm not at their call !  
 What, though they give not a relentless crew

Of civil furies, proud Oppression's fangs;  
 To tear, at pleasure, the dejected land;  
 With starving Labour pampering idle Waste!—  
 —To cloath the naked; feed the hungry; wipe  
 The guiltless tear from lone Affliction's eye;  
 To raise hid Merit; set the alluring sight  
 Of Virtue high to view; to nourish arts  
 Direct the thunder of an injured state;  
 Make a whole glorious people sing for joy;  
 Bless human kind; and through the downward depth  
 Of future times, to spread that *better* sun,  
 That lights up British soul:—for deeds like these,  
 The dazzling, fair career, unbounded lies;  
 While (still superiour bliss!) the dark abrupt  
 Is kindly barred; the precipice of ill!  
 Oh! luxury divine! O! poor to *this*,  
 The giddy glories of despotick thrones!  
 By this; by this, indeed, is imaged Heaven!  
 By boundless good; without the power of ill!

And now, behold! exalted as the cope  
 That swells immense, o'er many-peopled earth,  
 And like it, free, my fabrick stands complete;  
 The Palace of the Laws. To the four Heavens,  
 Four gates impartial thrown. Unceasing crowds;  
 With Kings themselves the hearty peasant mixed,  
 Pour urgent in: and though to different ranks  
 Responsive place belongs, yet equal spreads  
 The sheltering roof o'er all; while plenty flows,  
 And glad contentment echoes round the whole.  
 Ye floods, descend; ye winds, confirming, blow!  
 Nor outward tempest; nor corrosive time;  
 Nought but the felon, undermining hand  
 Of dark Corruption, can its frame dissolve;  
 And lay the toil of ages in the dust.

May our British Kings ever be thankful for that unrivalled political constitution, which prohibits them from doing evil; and may they ever exercise, with a paternal affection, and with a truly royal munificence, that divine prerogative with which it endows them, of doing all possible good! Might the actual dispensation of our laws be as accessible, and salutary to the inferiour orders of the community, as they are equal, and equitable, in theory! and let us offer our ardent supplications to Heaven, ere it be too late; and if our supplications can avail; that the *felon, undermining hand of dark corruption*, may not dissolve the fair, and august fabrick of this admirable constitution; and *lay the toil of ages in the dust!*

His Elegy to the memory of Lord Talbot, inspired by sincere, and overflowing gratitude, and abounding with warm, and extensive praise, is a tribute, however, to universally acknowledged, and great desert. The topicks of encomium are artfully, and agreeably varied; the poetry is luminous, and pathetick; and its march has a dignity worthy of the strains which



are consecrated to private, and publick virtue.

I come now to his Castle of Indolence; his best poem, after the Seasons. It is, indeed, a master-piece of poetry; it contains an infinite variety of entertainment, and instruction. It is equally, and eminently distinguished, by generous, and noble sentiment: and by fertile, and inventive imagination. The thoughts are vigorous; the pictures glowing, and diversified; the language florid, and harmonious. He is equally happy in adopting his old, and great master, Spenser's versification; and his allegorical scenes, and characters. The appendages, and the doctrine of *Indolence*, are contrasted, with a most emphatical morality, and painting, to the companions, and animating strains, of the *Knight of Arts, and Industry*.

The following stanza, from the Castle of Indolence, will deeply interest those distinguishing, and good minds, who regret the unprotected fate of poetry; unprotected, when its merit alone, however transcendent, pleads for patronage; and only rewarded, and stimulated, as it de-

serves, when it is favoured by objects, which are quite extrinsick, and foreign, to its own genuine excellence; by the contemptible selfishness of power; or by some vain, and gay circumstances, which are yet more contemptible.

Is there no patron, to protect the Muse;  
 And fence for *her*, Parnassus' barren soil?  
 To every labour its reward accrues;  
 And they are sure of bread, who swink, and toil:  
 But a fell tribe the Aonian hive despoil;  
 As ruthless wasps oft rob the painful bee:  
 Thus while the laws not guard the noblest toil,  
 Ne for the Muses other meed decree;  
 They praised are alone; and starve right merrily.

Castle of Indolence; Canto II. Stanza 2d.

How prophetick are these lines of our monthly literary assassins; who, with a pretence of candid, and liberal criticism, have notoriously stabbed the interest, and the fame, of authors of unquestionable merit; and yet are exempted from justice; in a country which boasts that its laws are peculiarly tender of property, and reputation!

Thomson, too, as it appears from these lines, thought that some encouragement was necessary to the well-being of a poet;

and to the happy exertions of his genius : and is not *this* an evident truth? Shall those incentives to arduous atchievement, which will always operate most powerfully on human nature, be lavished on grosser beings; and are frames of the finest sensibility to have *none*? In this opinion Thomson differed from the late Horace Walpole; who so rigorously asserts that a poet only needs pen, ink, and paper, that we may infer from his words, without very much aggravating their import, that he classed a poet with a chameleon; or that the matter which contributed to perpetuate his mind, might support his body. The practice of this man was perfectly consonant with his theory. If—“ aught *this* scene can threaten or indulge,” should discompose, and wound the mind; it would be, to see a little creature, pampered with luxury, vain of hereditary ignominy; and adulated into an idea that *his* puny, and pigmy intellect, is coefficient, and commensurate with the vigour, and expansion of genius; it would be, to see *this* creature throwing its arrogance on innate greatness; insensible to its adversity; insulting its pains! But I

am anticipating the part of another Lecture: the venal criticks; the convivial parasites; the tinsel connexions of this moral, and literary culprit, shall not skreen him from poetick justice: I will bring him to *her* honest tribunal, when I request your attention to another poet; to the golden strains and to the iron fate, of a young human prodigy!

But let active, and ingenuous minds; let minds peculiarly privileged by Heaven; and trained worthily of their high privileges, by severe, but salutary discipline; let *such* minds, and their friends, be consoled; let them be, for ever devoted to pure, and indeprivable enjoyments, by the stanza which immediately follows that which I have already quoted.

I care not, Fortune, what you *me* deny;  
 You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace;  
 You cannot shut the windows of the sky;  
 Through which Aurora shows her brightening face.  
 You cannot bar my constant feet to trace  
 The woods, and lawns, by living stream, at eve.  
 Let health my nerves, and finer fibres brace;  
 And I their toys to the great children leave:  
 Of fancy; reason; virtue; nought can me bereave.

Castle of Indolence; Canto II. Stanza 3d.

The Epitaphs, Songs, and other smaller



pieces of Thomson, are not unworthy of their authour; they flow with the general current of his soul: in a tender strain of sentiment; of refined passion; and of virtue. Among these productions, his Hymn to Solitude seems to claim the pre-eminence.

The poetry of Thomson's Plays is very nervous, and impassioned; and their dramatick merit, however severely it has been criticised, and censured, is considerable. *Tancred and Sigismunda* is now almost his only tragedy which is admitted on the stage; but from the exclusion of the rest, we cannot undervalue them; if we recollect what trifles; what buffoonery, are, in these times, received with avidity, and applause. His *Edward and Eleonora* is a pathetick, a beautiful tragedy; though it were to be wished, in general, that his dramatick performances were more marked with the simplicity; with the easy, but powerful strokes of Nature, than with the more elaborate eloquence of Young, and of Rowe.

I shall think myself very fortunate if you feel that I have not detained you too long with my remarks on Thomson, as a

poet. I shall now return, for awhile, to his ruling character, as a man.—I can give you an anecdote of him, which alone is a demonstrative evidence of his humane, and affectionate disposition: I am sure, it will be interesting to every mind that is alive to tender obligations. I had it from indisputable authority; and it has deeply impressed me, from my boyish days. The interview which I am going to relate was communicated to me about the year 1751; when I was at the grammar-school of Berwick upon Tweed; and for the honour of our poet's excellent heart, it should not be lost to the world. Mr. Robert Taylor, who was, for many years, a bookseller at Berwick, was well acquainted with Thomson's relations. They were in poor circumstances; and perhaps the following transaction principally referred to a sister of Thomson, to whom he wrote a kind letter, which has been published by Johnson. I have already made some observations on that letter; and at the close of this Lecture, I intend to give it a more particular attention. Mr. Taylor was a very active man in his business, which frequently called

him to the south of England. When he was preparing to take a journey to that quarter, a relation of Thomson gave him a letter to the poet; in which his pecuniary assistance was solicited; and which Mr. Taylor promised to deliver to him, with his own hand. Accordingly, he went from London to Kew, on purpose to visit him. Thomson had not yet risen, when Mr. Taylor arrived at his house, in a forenoon. The name of the stranger was sent up; and of the person who had entrusted to him the letter. Thomson immediately rose; and received him with all possible expedition. After giving the bookseller the kindest welcome, he read the letter with very visible, and strong emotions. He then opened his bureau; and showed Mr. Taylor all the money which he then possessed, and which was twenty guineas. He put ten into his hand; and desired him to transmit that sum to the writer of the letter, without loss of time. “I am a shamefully lazy  
 “correspondent” (added he) “but I hope  
 “that I shall answer this letter soon. In  
 “the mean time, desire my friends, when-  
 “ever they are in distress, to apply to *me*:

“ they shall never be disappointed; unless  
 “ I have absolutely no power to relieve  
 “ them.” These words, which I thought  
 the most pathetick of all speeches, were  
 interrupted by a conflict of sensibility,  
 and by tears. Mr. Taylor, in consequence  
 of the pressing request of the poet, stayed  
 with him till the next morning. They  
 passed their time with much agreeable  
 conversation, and with much heart-felt  
 remembrance of Scotland.

Permit me now to recite to you the  
 letter which he wrote to his sister, while  
 he was on a rural visit to Lord Lyttleton,  
 in the year 1747; about a year before his  
 death. It is a letter which deserves our  
 particular attention; by some of this com-  
 pany it may not have been seen; or it  
 may have been forgotten. In a former  
 part of my observations on Thomson, I  
 made a particular reference to this letter.  
 I remarked, that by the simplicity, and  
tenderness of its manner; by its “ warmth  
 “ from the soul, and faithfulness to her  
 “ fires,” it proved, beyond the possibility  
 of a doubt, the disposition, and mental  
habits of its authour; that it was a crite-  
 rion of his heart; and of the conduct



which predominated in his life. In my zeal; in my enthusiasm for the genius, and the productions of our great poets, I have not forgotten their lives; the virtues of which (to use the very words of Thomson) make “the more endearing song.”

“Hagley, in Worcestershire,  
October 4th, 1747.

“My dear Sister,

“I thought you had known me better  
“than to interpret my silence into a de-  
“cay of affection; especially as your  
“behaviour has always been such as  
“rather to increase than diminish it.  
“Don’t imagine, because I am a bad cor-  
“respondent, that I can ever prove an  
“unkind friend, and brother. I must do  
“myself the justice to tell you, that my  
“affections are naturally very fixed, and  
“constant; and *if* I had ever reason of  
“complaint against you (of which, by  
“the bye, I have not the least shadow) I  
“am conscious of so many defects in my-  
“self, as dispose me to be not a little  
“charitable, and forgiving.

“It gives me the truest heart-felt satis-  
“faction to hear that you have a good,

“ kind husband; and are in easy, con-  
 “ tented circumstances; but were they  
 “ otherwise, *that* would only awaken,  
 “ and heighten my tenderness towards  
 “ you. As our good, and tender-hearted  
 “ parents did not live to receive any ma-  
 “ terial testimonies of that highest human  
 “ gratitude I owed them (to which no-  
 “ thing could have given me equal plea-  
 “ sure) the only return I can make them,  
 “ *now*, is, by kindness to those they left  
 “ behind them. Would to God poor  
 “ Lizzy had lived longer, to have been a  
 “ farther witness of the truth of what I  
 “ say; and that I might have had the  
 “ pleasure of seeing once more, a sister  
 “ who so truly deserved my esteem, and  
 “ love. But *she* is happy; while *we* must  
 “ toil a little longer here below. Let us,  
 “ however, do it cheerfully, and grate-  
 “ fully; supported by the pleasing hope  
 “ of meeting again on a safer shoar;  
 “ where, to recollect the storms, and dif-  
 “ ficulties of life, will not perhaps be in-  
 “ consistent with that blissful state. You  
 “ did right to call your daughter by *her*  
 “ name; for you must needs have had a  
 “ particular, tender friendship for one

“ another; endeared as you were by na-  
 “ ture; by having passed the affectionate  
 “ years of your youth together; and by  
 “ that great softner, and engager of  
 “ hearts, mutual hardship. That it was  
 “ in *my* power to ease it a little, I account  
 “ one of the most exquisite pleasures of  
 “ my life. But enough of this melan-  
 “ choly, though not unpleasing strain.

“ I esteem you for your sensible, and  
 “ disinterested letter to Mr. Bell; as you  
 “ will see by my letter to him: as I ap-  
 “ prove entirely of his marrying again,  
 “ you may readily ask *me* why I do not  
 “ marry at all? My circumstances have,  
 “ hitherto, been so variable, and uncer-  
 “ tain, in this fluctuating world, as to in-  
 “ duce to keep me from engaging in such a  
 “ state; and now, though they are more  
 “ settled, and of late (which you will be  
 “ glad to hear) considerably improved; I  
 “ begin to think myself too far advanced  
 “ in life for such youthful undertakings;  
 “ not to mention some other petty rea-  
 “ sons that are apt to startle the delicacy  
 “ of difficult old batchelors. I am, how-  
 “ ever not a little suspicious that was I to  
 “ pay a visit to Scotland (which I have

“ some thought of doing soon) I might  
 “ possibly be tempted to think of a thing  
 “ not easily repaired, if done amiss. I  
 “ have always been of opinion that none  
 “ make better wives than the ladies of  
 “ Scotland; and yet who more forsaken  
 “ than they; while the gentlemen are  
 “ continually running abroad, all the  
 “ world over? Some of them, it is true,  
 “ are wise enough to return for a wife.  
 “ You see I am beginning to make in-  
 “ terest already with the Scots ladies.  
 “ But no more of this infectious subject.  
 “ Pray let me hear from you now and  
 “ then; and though I am not a regular  
 “ correspondent, yet perhaps I may mend  
 “ in that respect. Remember me kindly  
 “ to your husband; and believe me to be,  
 “ your most affectionate brother,

“ JAMES THOMSON.”

We must now be strongly impressed  
 with a most advantageous idea of Thom-  
 son's moral character. The grave, and  
 formal doctors of our duty, though they  
 are particularly rigourous in their ex-  
 actions from others, (especially, of petty,  
 and ostensible actions,) are not so tena-



cious (at least, in their own conduct) of the very essence of christianity; humanity; or tenderness to mankind. Yet “love,” or active, and universal benevolence, is, in the language of our celestial code, “the fulfilling of the law.” And, indeed, when we consider that every species of tyranny, and oppression, produces more misery; and every modification of sympathy, and beneficence, more happiness to the world, than all the other operations of the human mind; we shall find that the voice of Nature, and the voice of Reason, are, in this, as in every moral instance, in a most harmonious, and charming unison, with our divine religion. To crown, therefore, our praise of Thomson, we may safely pronounce him a true, practical christian. We can say nothing higher of a man’s temporal importance, if it is rightly understood; we can say nothing higher of his enjoyment, even of *this* transitory life; if *that* enjoyment, too, is properly comprehended; than that his conduct is animated, and directed, by the spirit of christianity. A most generous, and heavenly system! which will always have the love, and the zeal of every

sensible head; which is actuated by an honest, and feeling heart; of every independent, and ingenuous mind; whether he is smiled, or frowned on, by the hierarchy; who, by their luxury, and pride, and pomp of life, are the representatives of any thing rather than of the christian religion. So remote, indeed, is the time in which our Saviour lived; so extraordinary, and astonishing, are his mission, and character; and so far from the constant course of nature are all the other objects which ushered, and accompanied his revelation; that an honest, and virtuous man may, to some degree, be a sceptick; but he will be a sceptick with that modesty, and moderation which the subject of his scepticism deserves: while he doubts, he will revere; while he fears that a system which provides more effectually than all others, for the well-being; for the comfortable existence of mankind, may be human; he will most ardently wish that it may be divine! Such was the scepticism of the unprejudiced, and illustrious Rousseau. He states the main topicks, and arguments, in favour of christianity, and against it, when it is considered as a di-

vine revelation, perspicuously, and completely; and he gives them all their force. I must honestly acknowledge, that the result of this fair, and dispassionate reasoning, is, a reluctant diffidence; with a preponderance of belief. But as the first beauty in the universe is, moral beauty; it is no wonder that *his* susceptible, and elegant soul was morally enamoured with the character of Jesus Christ. Admiring the character, and charmed with it; as every sensible, and good heart *must* be; the just, and glowing colours; the force, and splendour of eloquence, with which he exhibits it, in a comparison between Christ, and Socrates, which is drawn by this great, and amiable sceptick, do as much honour to our excellent religion, as it is injured, and vilified, by the tawdry, and meretricious glare of prelatical splendour; by its enormous luxury; by its proud processions; by its mechanical, and insolent magnificence. This last epithet cannot be thought too violent; if we look back to the heavenly example, of whom these men pretend to be the immediate, and regular ministers; if we look

back to the humility of his manners ; and to the humbleness of his life.

Such was the scepticism of the elegant, and sublime Rousseau ; whose reasoning faculties were as acute, and vigorous, as his imagination was warm, and luxuriant. And I must think it an unquestionable truth ; that deliberate, and vindictive hostilities against christianity ; the best guide of our lives ; the best soother of our woes ; the best friend to all true pleasure ; were never maintained by any man who was, at once, *good*, and *great*. To rail at it, or to ridicule it, are infallible proofs of a bad taste, and of a bad heart. To persecute this divine institution, from the press, with a malignity of the deepest dye ; to attack it with a savage ferocity ; to attempt to undermine it, with a miserable, and illiterate sophistry ; to make it the subject of low, clownish gambols of the mind ; which pass with the writer, and with his gang, for wit ; *this* gothick warfare was reserved for our intellectual ruffians, and assassins ; it was reserved for the literary profligacy of the present times.

I am almost assured that you will, at



any time, excuse a digression; if it is not quite foreign from my main subject; in defence of a religion; which, if we had resolution, and constancy to practise, we should be rewarded with the highest possible enjoyment of good fortune; and in the worst, we should not be absolutely unhappy. Our superficial, and confident infidels, and atheists may charge me as peremptorily as they please, with abuse: I deem *them* the most mischievous enemies to mankind; therefore, as a friend to mankind, I am satisfied that I have only given them their just, and proper epithets, and appellations. You will, I am sure, as liberally excuse my repeated, and prolonged attention to the moral character of a poet; as you will undoubtedly, agree with me, that the practice of virtue not only gives the purest pleasure, and the supreme dignity to life; but that it likewise contributes, more than any other auxiliary, to animate, and exalt genius: a Chesterfield often says to his pupil, while he is recommending to his imitation a hypocritical phantom of polished vice;—"Remember the Graces!" But all graces fade, and shrivel before

those of virtue ! Wherever *she* moves, we feel the influence of a Majesty Divine ! Her smile illumines, and cheers a drooping world. Her bloom is Elysian, and eternal. Ever, then, be the burden of *my* song (enforced, I hope, *meliore plectro* than that of Stanhope)—*Remember the Graces !*

*LECTURE XIII.*

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**CHATTERTON.**

SEVERAL years elapsed from the time when I wrote my sentiments, and observations on Thomson; that amiable, and ardent poet; to the date of my calling up to my particular recollection, the illustrious, and immortal, but unfortunate, and melancholy subject, which I shall now beg leave to introduce to your attention. Disagreeable, and discouraging objects had interrupted my much loved studies. But in spite of difficulties, and obstructions, I collected my mind; and with any intellectual vigour of which I was capable, I applied to a task which had long been interwoven with my heart. Many, even of the most worthy, and illustrious men, have suffered hardships from the cradle to

the grave. Obstinate, and unrelenting adversity is often the lot of man:—but it is his duty; it is his honour, to resist, and to conquer, the oppressive effects of its opposition. This is a fine, and sublime kind of virtue. There are little creatures in the human form which are always at war with merit; but they should be annihilated in the mind of the poet, when he recollects, that, in spite of *their* puny, and momentary efforts, there is an immortality of fame on earth:—and a more glorious immortality in heaven; an absolute eternity, and a God. Oh! that these reflexions had often passed deliberately, and maturely, in the mind of that most admirable youthful prodigy; from whose grave I shall endeavour to tear the weeds with which it has been profaned by the dull, the malignant, and the slaves to artificial consequence; and to plant myrtles, and laurels, in their place! Oh! that *his* high, and great soul, which, if it had fortunately addressed but a particle of christianity, would have been gently, and kindly treated; and would probably have been a distinguished honour to human nature;—oh! that it had been a little more



flexible to its fortune, in *one* view; and emerged from it, and towered above it, in *another*;—that it had not thrown itself on the *stoical*, but relied firmly on the *christian* school;—that it had preserved a patience in the most unworthy, in the most horrible circumstances (without which virtue we can neither be good, nor great) till he had arrived at his splendid meridian, till he had shone forth with all his glory! The feelings of the truly humane would then have escaped many painful images; they would have escaped the pain of investigating much pedantick rubbish; and an honest indignation at stupid, cold, and insensible erudition; and of a most debasing, and abject sycophantry to the great.

Your freedom from prejudice; your good sense, and the generosity of your hearts (I doubt not that you possess all these virtues) expect that I am to inform you that I shall, in this Lecture, with the best exertion of my humble abilities, take a comprehensive, and I hope, not an incomplete view, of the astonishing genius, and of the fate which will ever be deeply

lamented by the truly wise, and good, of *Thomas Chatterton!*

The honour of our country; the eternal glory of the republick of letters, is concerned in *this* object. If Chatterton had lived to the usual term of human life, England would have been splendidly adorned with one great poet more; with as great a poet as it was possible for human nature to produce. His meridian would have been analogous to his dawn: what a blaze of glory would then have been spread over our poetical hemisphere! I know that Mr. Walpole (I hope that he will be long, and best known by that name) with his usual penetration, judgement, and taste, and with his usual generosity to our divine, young poet, doubts that his genius would have fulfilled its promises, if he had lived much longer. *Mediocrity* of poetical talents (if, indeed, these talents are compatible with poetry) have *often* disappointed the early, and flattering expectations which they raised; *genuine*, and *great* talents, *never*. It is almost superfluous to cite examples of *this* truth. Shakespeare, Milton, Pope,

Dr. Johnson; Cowley, the last, and the least (for all his conceited, and metaphysical stuff disgusts me) warrant, and prove my assertion. The same ingenious critick mentions, and in the same period, and compares Chatterton, and Psalmanazar. I care not if Psalmanazar, and his island of Formosa, and his invented language, and the five huge quarto volumes of Mr. Walpole were thrown into the sea: but I should be extremely concerned if we should forget the memory, and lose the writings; the elegant, and animated fictions; and the miscellanies themselves, of the poet, whose fate, *semper acerbum*, and whose name, *semper honoratum (sic dii voluistis) habebo*.

I am afraid that I have undertaken this fair, and generous task, at too advanced, and languid an age:—permit me to call it generous; for all my judgement, all my sentiments on this interesting, and important object, shall be purely dictated by a warm contempt of uncharitable dispositions; of all temporizing, and mean reserve; and by an ardent love of moral, and literary justice; and of the golden law of humanity. The subject demanded

lively spirits; and the honest fire of better years. I am launching into the Baltick, when I should be consecrating my votive picture in the temple of the god of the ocean. But I am addressing liberal, and benevolent judges; your sympathy with the inauspicious causes of the delay will give a *relief* to the weakness of the performance. My sincerity, and frankness, however, shall atone, as far as they *can* atone, for my want of presence of mind; of penetration, and of energy. My observations, and animadversions, my praise, and my censure, shall be unrestrained with any unmanly, and ignominious awe; they shall flow from the ingenuous principles which I have asserted; and therefore they shall flow with a perfect freedom. I do not presume to claim any extraordinary merit; the image of superiour, and expiring genius is before me; and it overwhelms me with grief; it prostrates me with humility. I shall only beg leave to observe, that the value of the fair, and determined freedom which I shall exercise, will not be lost on unprejudiced, and liberal minds; for *that* freedom, when it is directed by talents more



vigorous than mine, produces, or ought to produce, if it is attended with the consequences which it deserves, the most instructive, the most salutary, and the most glorious effects. It distinguishes, and determines, in those departments of morality, which are inaccessible to the laws; it is a Chancellour in the court of the kingdom of Minerva; the laurels which were intercepted from genius, by envy, and adulation, it tears from the brows to which they were sacrilegiously prostituted, and assigns them to their legitimate heirs:—in its intrepid, and indefatigable pursuit of those truths which are of the utmost consequence to mankind, it scorns to be checked, for a moment, by the meteors of vanity; by the phantoms of fashion, and the pygmies of arrogance, which presume to stand in its way; it bestows a well-deserved, and immortal eulogy, on the Cosmos, and the Lorenzos de' Medici; who munificently anticipated, instead of obdurately rejecting the views of indigent, and persevering talents:—it lifts the golden scale of poetical justice, and contrasts these august fathers of literature, with *little* creatures environed

with affluence, and reposing on luxury; mistaking whim for talent, and passion for taste; lavishing a great sum on a glittering gem, or an inanimate picture; while they are inexorable to the petitions of oppressed genius; deaf to its pathological complaints; dead to its divine aspirations. May this fair, and manly freedom be for ever transmitted to *some* sons of English literature; and let them be watchful to exert it on interesting, and important emergencies: seasonably, and unreservedly diffused, it may produce great national good; it may prevent great national evil; if indeed a phlegmatick statesman will allow that true poetry delights, instructs, and polishes a nation; it may rescue a future Chatterton (if God Almighty ever again grants an equal phænomemon to an ungrateful world)—it may rescue some future Chatterton from famine, and from death.

Accept, or forgive some prefatory discourse, before I enter on the stamina of my work: prejudices, if it is possible, are to be cleared away from the memory of the dead, and from the character of the living.

When an authour thinks it incumbent on him to animadvert on the conduct, or the writings of a person who is highly favoured by fortune, it is required of him by a too complaisant, and partial world, however base the conduct, or however dull the writings may be, which he intends to censure, that he should address the man who has accidentally more power than himself, in terms of the most unexceptionable deference, and respect. Hence the nerves of thought, and language are emasculated; they fall short of truth; the complexion, and the soul of eloquence are tainted; she wears a sickly hue; she has a drooping, and an abject manner; she ventures not the closeness, and strength of her arguments; the variety, the force, and the beauty of her imagery; to instruct, and enrapture the world:—it is a profane, and slavish tribute, “at the “ shrine of luxury, and pride;” not a sacred, and free-will offering, at the altar of wisdom. Yet thanks be to genius, and to Providence, *these* prostrations are generally made by those whose minds are as weak as their hearts are sordid: the Divine Economist is almost continually

drawing the exertion of fine talents towards himself;—He seldom suffers them to go out of their way.

Thus, agreeably to my theory, which, I am sorry to say, is established by the practice of mankind, if such an opponent of wealth, or power, hath asserted that the object of his remonstrances, and reprehensions, is *perfidious, avaricious, and tyrannical*; though he has completely deserved these epithets, by the most evident, and abandoned acts; the pamphlet, or the book, and the authour, are immediately sentenced to proscription by a polite *auto da fe*; though he has been disinterestedly, and virtuously endeavouring to supply the deficiency of the laws; to mortify with publick shame a great, and unrelenting offender against the community. The work is pronounced to be grossly, and scandalously abusive; though none but the obnoxious words could have been used, without a confusion of ideas; without a misapplication of language; without a desertion of justice. *Abuse*, however, is the word;—the order of the day; a sentence of Laconian brevity; but not of Laconian truth, and virtue: it has,



however, all the desired effect on the crowd; on “the great vulgar, and the small;” who are by no means Lacedæmonians; it completely damns the authour, and his works; who yet retains hopes of ample justice; of a *literary resurrection*. But the parties who are interested for their favourite, would be fools, indeed, if they took the pains to enforce and dignify the retort, *abuse*, with any auxiliaries of reason. Let this retort be thrown out by himself, with an affected indifference, and disdain; let it be echoed by his convivial parasites, by his venal criticks, and by modish life; and it will effectually supersede the toil of argument; the patience of refutation.

I am advancing to the point which I have had in view; I shall endeavour to give you a true definition, and description; the genuine signification, and import of the word, *abuse*.

Abuse, in its philological acceptation, is simply a misuse, or misapplication of language. Hence, to apply terms of severe crimination (however warrantably, and properly they may be used, on several occasions, by classical, and elegant writ-

ers)—to apply such terms where they are by no means deserved, is palpable, and flagrant abuse. To lavish high, and altogether unmerited praise, is the direct inversion of this abuse: it is poetically expressed, and illustrated by Dr. Young: “Praise undeserved is satire in disguise.” But all low, vulgar language; all that language which is comprized in scurrility, is absolutely, and universally abuse: it is abhorrent from all propriety, and dignity of language. To throw it on the *good*, shows a *profligate*, to dart it at the *bad*, shows an *indelicate* mind. It is never justifiable; it is never admissible; it will never be used by the true gentleman; by the liberal scholar.

I shall here make a reference which probably may produce an instance of the common perversion of the word, *abuse*. Mr. Walpole, in his pretended, and puritanical vindication of his conduct to Chatterton, reminds me of one of the gods of the Egyptians, which weeps while it destroys. After the death of our young poet, he collected some of his papers, which tended to injure, and shade his memory; and he printed them at Strawberry-

hill; whence had often issued incongruous, flimsy, and languid productions. He imagined that to bring odium on the character of Chatterton was to support his own. A man must tremble for the strength of his cause, who can stoop to such detestable, yet impotent, modes of defence. In his account of Chatterton, he gives us a list of those pieces; their subjects; and his manner of treating them. One of them is addressed to Charles Jenkinson, Esq. “This (says Mr. Walpole) “is an *abusive* letter, signed Decimus.” Another is a letter to Lord Mansfield. This he pronounces “a *very abusive* letter.” I have not seen either of the letters; nor do I wish to see them, any farther than as they were written by Chatterton. But I can easily conceive that letters to Charles Jenkinson, and to the late Lord Mansfield, might have been very severe, without being *abusive*; if we use *impartial*, and *proper* language

I shall now give an example of *real abuse*; in the form of totally unmerited praise. Mr. Walpole’s apology for his treatment of Chatterton was published in the year 1782, in four Gentleman’s Maga-

zines. The editor of that Magazine introduces the different parts of the apology, by bestowing on its authour very eminent literary titles; he invites our attention to this *elegant, masterly, admirable writer*. All the writings of the late Lord Orford, both in verse, and prose, unless our mental sight is so despicably weak as not to be able to view them without the meretricious, and imaginary gloss which his situation in life threw over them, are below mediocrity. But whenever he makes Chatterton his unfortunate subject, he sinks beneath himself. All, then, is weakness, confusion, insipidity, and barbarism of style; self-contradiction; alternate pity, praise, and crimination. The reproofs of conscience, and the apprehension of publick discredit, relax the nerves which were feeble, by nature. The timidity of the heart depresses the weakness of the head.

If my definition of abuse is just (and I think that it cannot easily be exploded) the terms, *profligate, abandoned, forger, and impostor*;—terms which convey the most detested ideas; are, in my humble opinion, as they have been applied to



Chatterton, most criminal, and barbarous abuse; as I hope, hereafter, to *prove*.—They have been applied to him by the editors of his works, both of the clergy, and of the laity; by cautious, and plausible men; who have, therefore, passed a moral muster in life, with decency, and decorum. With an anxious, and servile reverence, they have been tender of the *great*; but they have given friendless, and deserted *indigence* no quarter: its indefatigable application; its unparalleled genius; its ardour for poetical glory; its generous, and noble virtues, which began to blow;—all *these* powerful advocates could not atone for its failings; could not save it from their preposterous, and inquisitorial condemnation. Rigidly to require from an unexperienced boy;—rigidly to require from astonishing, but immature talents, which must necessarily be strongly fermented by passion, and imagination;—rigidly to require from *this* prodigy, the attentive, and comprehensive judgement, and consequently the mature, and accurate virtue of the man, is an instance of tyranny, in the ethical

chair, in which absurdity, and barbarity, contend for the predominance.

Mr. Bryant, too, often *abuses* our juvenile, but great poet, agreeably to *my* simple, but sure criterion of *abuse*. Good God! can the mild, the prudent, the pious Mr. Bryant be guilty of abuse? He *is*, according to *my* literary, and moral creed. —“Puerile ignorance;”—“the unlettered “boy;”—“the boy of Bristol;”—“the “young man of Bristol:”—“the blunders of the ignorant boy, who was continually hunting in Kersey’s Dictionary, “in a most servile manner;”—all *this* is the superciliousness, and pride; or, in other words, the *abuse*; the ungenerous, and arrogant misapplication of language; of the low, conceited pedant, and antiquarian; of the despiser of a being of an order superiour to his own;—of the despiser of one of the most admirable works of God!

I have observed that honest, and severe truths, when they are published against the highly fortunate; however strongly the publication of them may be warranted by justice, are generally termed *abuse*.

Consistently with *this* Turkish despotism in the intellectual regions of a free state ; if an illiberal authour insults a poor, and unprotected person, on whom perhaps his Maker hath bestowed the most splendid endowments, with very harsh, and undeserved language; a literary Sultan; and his Janizaries, and Muftis, see nothing gross; nothing indelicate, in this treatment; though it is the obloquy of an unfeeling heart ; the very extremity of abuse. I am sorry that it is in my power to demonstrate this moral proposition by the history of Chatterton. No favourite pursuit seems more effectually to deaden all that is generous, and godlike, in the human mind, than that of a verbal critick, and minute antiquarian. I should have said that minds formed in the lowest scale of nature, can alone be engrossed by such ignoble and childish pursuits. These men sit down to dispute on the origin of the poems of the imagined Rowley. On the *one* side we have to encounter the most monstrous, and disgusting chimeras, obtruded on us by the most absurd, and extravagant demands; and often warranted by no better authority than that of

duplicity, and bad faith. On the *other*, we meet a series of just arguments, and fair examples;—the cold, and hard accuracy of reasoning, and detail; which make *some* atonement for a want of animation, and sentiment; and even of that *angelick humanity*, which it is supposed that literature particularly improves. These gentlemen have been very ungrateful to a great, but unfortunate hero, by whom Rowley was created; for he opened to them a new, and large field, for their admired sports; he instituted their Olympic games. They are often obliged to mention their benefactor; but they always mention him with contempt, when we consider his comparative, and unrivalled excellence; they are always careful to sink his virtues, and to aggravate his faults: on this article of war (if we trace it to its source, I wish that we may not find it a law of nations) the combatants on either side are perfectly agreed, through their whole contest; they adhere to it, with a ruthless, and inexorable precision. These critical Machiavellis, in *one* of their characteristicks, adopted this exterminating spirit of the Florentine; partly from



the hardness of their nature; and partly from a temporary, but unsubstantial policy. They sacrificed a demi-god to a common mortal; they could not have done justice to the greatness of the *one*; they could not have embalmed his memory with an honest commiseration; without exposing the littleness of the *other*. For though perhaps *their hearts never burned within them*, like those of the travellers to Emmaus; I am confident that they would have shown *some* christian warmth, in favour of Chatterton: if they had not been intimidated, and congealed, by the frozen, and evil genius of Walpole: to *him* they hold an invariable strain of deference, respect, and adulation, which discredits them extremely. For it will not be difficult to prove his insensibility to talents, which he himself calls *miraculous*, when their possessour, naturally solicitous to emerge from indigence, and oppression, requested of him *that* assistance which might easily have been granted;—an insensibility, which, in spite of many miserable subterfuges, and palliations, argues a far worse disposition than any act in the short-lived, and unesta-

blished conduct of our illustrious youth. This partial, and servile homage completely discredits these men, when we recollect the invidious, and opprobrious epithets, and appellations, with which they insult *his* memory. To all those who are, I will not say what Christians, but what mere men ought to be, he always *was*, and always *will* be, an object of tenderness, compassion, and admiration. These inquisitors, and unmerciful censors, have, in their treatment of Chatterton, been guilty of the very quintessence of abuse; of a refinement on its barbarity. They who do not like this ardour, which is fair, nay commendable, I hope, may, if they please, term it mere declamation: but what my zeal has now asserted, I trust that my reasoning will, hereafter, prove. All this rude irreverence to the manes of Chatterton hath been received with distinct approbation, or with timid acquiescence. The rudeness was shown to himself, and to his works, by discreet, and guarded men: they were perfect masters in the game of life; they knew where they might insult with safety; and where their incense would

meet its reward;—vanity delighting vanity; and little pride remunerating with its toys more diminutive servility. Discretion is a most useful companion through life; without any labour; without any danger, we obtain the Lilliputian guide: it is true, she is a pigmy being; but she has a power of prodigious energy; she redeems dullness, absurdity, vices, and crimes. Nay, the little urchin, amongst her other stupendous tricks of magick, sometimes steals upon us, in the form, and panoply of Minerva;—in the shade, and the semblance of heroick virtue.

If rough language is *abuse*, in proportion to the importance of the person to whom it is applied, according to the prevailing, but inconclusive logick of the world; I shall endeavour to correct, and invigorate that logick, by directing its predicate, *not* to fictitious, external, and social; but to real, inherent, and indivisible personal excellence. If it was insufferable presumption from a poor boy of a generous nature, to acquaint Mr. Walpole, with a becoming spirit, that he was properly sensible of his arrogant, and contemptuous neglect of him; with what

censure severe enough shall we condemn the ungrounded calumny; the inhuman reproaches, that were thrown on a being infinitely superiour to *Walpole*—on *Chatterton himself*? For what is *Pomfret*, when we think of *Homer*?—what is the amusing gleam of the *earth-born glow-worm*, compared with the *enrapturing rays* that descend from Heaven, and from Apollo? Permit me to remind those who may not be altogether pleased with my art of emblazoning, that *my* office of heraldry contains armorial bearings which are far more ancient, more noble, and venerable, than those of the Brunswicks, and Bourbons;—they sprung, and their degrees were marshalled, in the council of the skies; and they were sent down to earth, by God, at the time of the creation.

How dreadfully oppressive appears the fate of the poor; when it is not softened, and informed, by the spirit of humanity! No respite is given to their bodies; no indulgence to their minds! In *them*, even indications of those qualities which demand our love, and our esteem, are frequently construed into crimes. When



Mr. Walpole, with an unfeeling, and unpardonable rudeness, had delayed for six weeks, the return of the specimens of poetry that Chatterton had sent to him, the youth, with a fair, and manly sensibility, told him, in a letter, “that he would not “have so long neglected him, if he had “not been poor, and friendless.” To the truth of this assertion, every one who is at all acquainted with human nature will immediately assent. And the assertion was the glowing blossom of a noble pride; of an independent spirit, without which there is no virtue. The courtly gentleman, who saw nothing but poverty on *one* side, and rank (though it was most ignominiously inherited) on the *other*, observed, in the usual style of *such* men, on such occasions, that the letter which contained that ingenuous remonstrance, “was singularly impertinent.”—If there is an inexpressibly elegant, and fine luxury, in indulging the humane, and pathetick emotions, it is better to have been trained in the school of the Carthaginian queen, than at Houghton, or in Berkley-square. The obnoxious expression of my hero (whom, in spite of priests, I hope to

canonize in the calendar of Parnassus) would have been accepted by a soul congenial with his own, as an omen, as an oracle of future greatness: he would have invited him to town; he would have clasped him to his heart. But the man whom Chatterton addressed, as a patron of literature, resembled the portentous victim that was sacrificed before the death of Cæsar—*he had no heart*.

I may be told, not by any of my audience, but by some Partridge of a Fielding;—"De mortuis nil nisi bonum."—It is a monkish, doating adage. It is worne to tatters by your phlegmatick, and demure scribblers: even Mr. Tyrwhitt adopts it, when he tenderly and delicately, mentions one of our English Dutch commentators, who had signed himself *Anonymous*; and who had presumed to sit in judgement on the old poetry of Chatterton. This gentleman is actually flatter, and more absurd than Mr. Bryant, and Dean Milles. There is in antiquarians, an *esprit de corps*, resembling that of churchmen; their competitors in gravity, and gravitation. Mr. Tyrwhitt is too conscientious, and civilized, to utter a syllable against Mr. Bryant,

(even where he must have seen that he was both weak, and disingenuous) or against the *departed Anonymous*: but on every occasion, he speaks most uncharitably, and unfeelingly, of the *departed Chatterton*. To the *de mortuis nil nisi verum* I cheerfully subscribe; to this rule, with my best information, and judgment, I shall always be religiously attentive. But let conspicuous merit, let notorious guilt, be characterized by posterity, as they deserve. I shall never hesitate to arraign the avarice, hypocrisy, and obduracy;—while it shall be my heartfelt pleasure, to commemorate the open, and generous disposition, and the benevolence of *the dead*. When a king of old Egypt died, it was the civil office of a publick speaker, to pronounce a funeral oration over his body, before it was conveyed across the Nile, to its place of interment. (Hence arose the classical Styx, and Charon; and Tartarus; and the Elysian fields.) It was the peculiar duty of this orator, to give a faithful, and striking picture of the departed monarch; to consecrate his virtues, or to execrate his crimes:—thus the succeeding prince was most powerfully

deterred from vice, and stimulated to virtue. With the same disinterestedness am I now speaking; with the same ardour for the publick good. Nor let me be profanely ridiculed for the inferiority of my subject: the productions of great poets have a national influence, as well as the conduct of great kings. This truth seems ~~not~~ to have made its proper impression in England, by the conduct of our cold, prosaick statesmen. It is my wish, as it is my effort, to warn, and intimidate future Walpoles, if a future Chatterton should arise;—to make those prudent, from fear, who may be ungenerous, by nature; and to prepare some distinguished individual, of an elegant soul, and of a publick spirit,—or some wise, and good government, jealous, and enthusiastick for the glory of all its fine arts, to turn, with the sentiments of adoration, toward the east of their literary republick; whenever such a rising sun of poetry shall illumine its horizon.

Whatever other invidious charges have been brought against me by dullness, and malevolence, I believe that they have never accused me of cowardice, as an au-



thour. I wish that Mr. Walpole was yet alive, for very different reasons. I wish that he, and some celebrated persons were now amongst us, who have payed the last debt to Nature; that I might have been subject to a full refutation, if I deserved it; and that I might have had the honour to plead before a larger tribunal of true critical acumen; which is always dipped in the balm of liberality. I am erecting a beacon near the rock on which the poetical first-rate of Chatterton bulged, only from publick views; therefore I hope that I deserve not resentment, and malignity; but that I am rather, in *some* degree, entitled to good will, and approbation. When I shall have left this world, myself, in the name of humanity, and religion, let not my ashes be wantonly, and cruelly insulted; but let my faults be honestly recorded; not by the ignorance, and insensibility of some slave of the press; but by the distinguishing mind, and good intentions of a moral, and virtuous censor; in *his* pages, they may be useful to the conduct of the rising generation. If I have not dwelt too long on an unimportant subject, permit me to add, that per-

haps I may live to execute this instructive task with my own hand: if I perform it, I publicly promise beforehand, that I shall be more direct, and ingenuous, against myself than the *good* future biographer would *be*, whom I have had in my eye. I shall provide a fund of consolation, and satisfaction, for my last years, in the soothing consciousness that I shall make some amends to mankind, by my posthumous services, for the little good which I did, while I lived.

If I seem too particular; if I am even too diffuse, your penetration, as well as your goodness, will excuse me. My main subject (I mean, the history of Chatterton) is rare; and it is as uncommonly interesting: it is composed of extraordinary, complicated, and exemplary instances of every manly sentiment; and of a glorious, but mistaken determination, from an excess of that sentiment, to die. I know that you will pardon *some* singularity in this address;—the occasion is singular; I hope that it never will again occur, in the moral, social, and literary world.

Nor have I, without reason, very amply

treated the subject of abuse. If we consider the term deliberately, and what it properly, and completely implies; if we mark its various degrees, and discriminations; we shall avoid many errors; and we shall be instructed by many truths; which, without this useful scrutiny, would be inaccessible to our minds: they will not be checked by the superciliousness of the rich; nor by that contempt, and oppression, which repell the warrantable freedom of the poor. It hath still been my wish to make these Lectures of Criticism as extensively useful as I could; to dignify them with a moral strain. This deviation, I hope, is not culpably, is not impertinently digressive.

I have been told that nothing more can be said on the subject of Chatterton than what has already been presented to the publick. To the philological, and antiquarian toils, and efforts;—to the weak, and ridiculous conjectures, and visions of the pedant;—to the series of just, and decisive, but inanimate, and frigid criticism;—to the undistinguishing stupidity, which, yet presumed to exhibit faults, and beauties; to the cowardly silence, and yet

more cowardly adulation; to the dastardly, yet insolent vindications, which have originated from *his* history, and fate; *no* additions can be made. The fair field of judicious, liberal, and animated criticism on his works;—of an open, generous, and pathetick interest in his destiny;—of an independent, and explicit censure, contempt, and detestation of unfeeling parasites;—of a refutation, or rather an exposure, of a timorous, feeble, and hypocritical self-defence;—*this* fertile, and luxuriant field has been, hitherto, unoccupied; at least, it has not been regularly, and thoroughly engaged;—I wish that it had been destined to the abilities which it merits; but justice will not *yet* be done to Chatterton;—for it has been reserved for *me*.

It is an impossibility for me, and I do not regret the impossibility, whatever unpopularity it *has*, or *may* cost me, to write on *any* interesting subject, without independence of mind, and what I think fair freedom. *That* freedom, of all the literary objects which ever engaged my attention, the present eulogy demanded. The spirit of departed genius seemed to



demand it of me. If several persons who are highly favoured with publick esteem, have applied the severest language to Chatterton, with injustice, and inhumanity; I, surely, have a right to retaliate a severity of language on *them*, in the cause of justice, and *humanity*. Nor should I have mentioned them with any disagreeable expressions, if they had not shown dispositions which I abhor;—a sordid idolatry to Fortune; a hard, unrelenting nature; and the most contemptuous, and vilifying aspersions, when the essence, and the circumstances of their theme emphatically called for the reverse. I look up to all that was truly magnanimous in the character of Cæsar, with humility; yet, I thank God, I can forget my private wrongs as soon as *he* forgot them; unless I am menaced with the truncheon of some mock-Pompey: but when cruel, and atrocious injuries are done to those who have been singularly great, and singularly unfortunate; and who are dead, and cannot resist their oppressours;—*those* injuries I love to remember; and openly to resent;—and if I can, with some effect. There is a class of

beings who will certainly murmur; but conscience acquits me;—acquits me, did I say? She rewards me;—

I know it virtue; and I feel it fame:

CHURCHILL.

Permit me still to make some general observations; before I enter on our critical disquisitions. They shall not be desultory, and vague; they shall be connected with the principal objects, to which I hope to be honoured with your attention. Almost all evil has its good; by the unerring temperature of the Divine economy; otherwise, in His works, there would be some destructive jarring, and collision. This observation is not only applicable to the physical, and moral, but likewise to the literary world. The “new meanders” of ductile dulness may suggest the ductility of better sentiments, and observations; the conceit, and trifles of the pedant, and antiquary, may excite a contrasted strain of liberal, and useful writing: the rigorous fate of indigent, and unprotected authours, sometimes overwhelms them; but sometimes it happily stimulates them; it makes them the

more ambitious to rise above poverty, and envy; it calls their attention from the pageantry, and frippery of life, to a contemplation of *truly* beautiful, and sublime objects: it gives a collected dignity; an intellectual, and moral majesty to the mind; and instead of weakening the spring of its exertions, it invigorates its elasticity. The same hard fate may suggest observations, and resources, to a friend of genius, and of mankind, which would remove, which would abolish that fate; and they should be accepted; they should be improved, and matured into execution, by those who have unlimited power to relieve distress, and to reward merit.

England has been highly, and justly celebrated, for learning, and for genius. It excells modern Europe in all, and ancient Europe, in many kinds of composition. It has produced statesmen, too, it has produced ministers of state, who were as elevated by Nature, as by Fortune, and station; who were as victorious with the powers of the mind; with the force of eloquence, as they were with their fleets, and armies. *Such men must have*

enjoyed the eloquence of a great authour, in prose; or his more captivating charms, in poetry. Their minds, too, at once expanding, and comprehending, must have been sensible that such authours were great benefactors to their country; that they prepared for it its noblest entertainment; that they adorned it, not only with the surface, but with the substance of elegance; that they breathed into it the celestial spirit of humanity; that they cherished, and augmented all its virtues; and consequently, its happiness. I am truly concerned to compare these ministers with such a wretch as Charles the Second. They enjoyed “the feast of reason, and the flow of soul;”—indifferent, like *him*, to the woes, and mortifications; indifferent to the wants of those from whose mighty magick they received the banquet. Is it not surprising; is it not unaccountable, that in *this* country, and with *these* governours, some civil institution has not been formed, to watch, and observe the fair blow of genuine talents; to foster them with the genial warmth, and sunshine of paternal care, and encouragement; and to protect them from



the frost of selfishness, and from the blight of despair? It is not compatible with my present plan, particularly to construct a rational, obvious, and easy project; but every unprejudiced, and sensible person will allow that nothing can be more practicable than its completion, and execution. The wants of great genius, if it is at all regulated by virtue, are easily supplied;—it is rich, and splendid, in learning; in ideas; in imagery; in ambition, and in glory. The society which I propose, might be established under the auspices, and support of Government;—at a comparatively imperceptible part of the vast expenditure which is lavished on the great officers of state, when they are dismissed, or when they resign;—who were largely recompensed for their publick services, while they held their respective departments; and who have often cancelled all their publick services by the grossest political blunders; and by treachery, and peculation.

Most of our illustrious writers have emerged from obscurity, by their mental force; and most of them have been poor, and indigent; or, at least, all their lives,

in very narrow circumstances. At no period of the history of a great community, will transcendent merit alone be a man's effectual friend; he must learn the gradual, and painful art of conciliating the fashionable, and the powerful to his interest; he must stoop to a kind of squalid chymical process; he must be incorporated with heterogeneous bodies; he must be amalgamated with gold, to command his fortune. There is a spirit in true genius which may counteract itself;—its very lustre may send it into darkness.

Thus it is easy to see what has often been the case; that fine talents may be at the mercy of booksellers. Important truth is much dearer to me than *these traders*. But I by no means intend *particularly* to criminate, or reproach *them*. They are *men*; and as interest is habitually their ruling object, they will persue it, with very little, or no tenderness for the rights, or for the distress of others. They will keep a hawk's eye on the poor, and industrious, but bright, and cultivated mind. Like their brethren of iron memory, they will kindly invite an un-

experienced, and ardent Chatterton, from his unfeeling Bristol, to a more unfeeling metropolis; they will hold forth to him honours, and generosity. He comes; he is caught in their fangs; his poverty, and his want of friends excite not the domestic, and convivial exhilaration; they suggest not the pecuniary liberality; they only dictate the harder bargain. The idea of his unexampled talents (for the owls feel *some* glimmering of that heavenly light) instead of softening their hearts, cases them with harder steel. With the true spirit of avarice, and rapacity, they are now determined to have as *much* as is possible, for as *little* as is possible; agreeably to a maxim of their brethren of the Synagogue. All the rest of this nefarious oppression is unrelenting barbarity, on the side of *trade*; on that of *sensibility*, and *delicacy*, it is horror, and despair.

After this faithful account of the treatment which a poor, and friendless authour must always expect, what shall we say to the following remark of Mr. Bryant;—  
 “ His bad success in his last stage of life  
 “ shows that he did not answer the ex-

“pectations of those who employed “him\*.”—What sentence is equal to *this* impious and inhuman indignity? With what severity of censure shall we stigmatize it as it deserves? What expansion of charity can make it an object of its alleviation? To reason against it would be to profane reason. If it proceeded from ignorance of life, it was the ignorance of an idiot; and though in his book, he often approaches to that ignorance, the passage which I have now quoted is the wretched effort of a little scholastick pride, which tumbles down every thing that stands in its way; dashes, and flounders, *per fas atque nefas*; while it pursues the monstrous, and ridiculous phantom of a sick man’s dream,

But booksellers, and their emissaries have, of late, been industrious to disseminate an extraordinary concession of Dr. Johnson, in their favour; who, it seems, in his latter, and in every sense, weaker years, allowed that “booksellers “were a very respectable body of men; “and the best patrons of learning.” Dr.

\* Bryant’s Observ. p. 491.



Johnson was a great man ; but he had his littleness, and his inconsistency ; he frequently spoke, and wrote, *not* from uniform, and well established principles ; but from the impressions of the moment. He publicly disdained, and reprobated an obligation which he afterwards incurred ; and even a pension, when he had long possessed it, unnecessarily seduced him. The consciousness of his late, but pleasing consequence ; the consciousness that he was now lord of those who used to lord it over *him*, soothed his pride ; and their flattery disarmed him. He would not have prostituted his praise of the liberality of booksellers, when his fortune, and his just pretensions were at war with each other ; when he was in the parsimonious pay of booksellers ;—when he wrote his *London*, and his *Vanity of Human Wishes* ;—his *Life of Savage* ;—his *Dictionary*, and his *Rambler* ;—when he was in the plenitude of his intellectual powers ; of his literary glory.

I have two anecdotes (among many others) of this great man, which are very pertinent to my present purpose. I was mentioning to him some base treatment

which I had received from one of those men:—" You need not, Stockdale," (said he) " represent to *me* the case of an author, and a bookseller: I have had long, and painful experience of them, and I know them thoroughly."—My second anecdote is truly interesting; and, I think, *pathetick*. He had been much indisposed, for some time, with a disorder in his eyes. I visited him, when he was recovering, on a Sunday-morning, at his house, in Johnson's Court, Fleet-street. When I expressed " my pleasure to find that his eyes were so much better;"—he told me that " he felt himself so well that he had intended to go abroad on that day; but that he could not think of any particular place to which he *should* go." I replied, that " I should have imagined that he never could have been at a loss for such an object."—The tear stood in his eye; and he said;—" My dear Stockdale; I lived many years in London, and *had no place to go to.*"—*These* are accurately his words; and by the pathos with which they were delivered, they are engraven on my heart. But would *this* have been the situation of Johnson in

London, for many years, if booksellers had been really “a very respectable class of men;” if they had been the liberal, and protecting friends of distinguished literary desert? The reverse of this compliment, empty, and ungrounded as it is, and of injurious tendency;—the reverse of it is the truth. According to the steady, and undeviating views of commerce, the treatment of booksellers to authours is invariably modelled, and determined by two considerations; the ability of the authours to serve *their* interest; and their support, or want of it, from private fortune, or from powerful connexions. If these men could be actuated by pure generosity, would an Otway have died of famine; would Dryden have, all his life, been in embarrassment, and distress; would he have dreaded the insolence of the older Tonson; would Johnson himself have been oppressed with penury, long after the maturity of his life; would his melancholy signature, *Impransus*, have been necessary, when he was writing to *Cave*, his *friend*, but his *employer*?—Would the exquisite feelings; would the nobly aspiring soul of Chatterton have

been stung, to despair?—No:—let the ingenuous, and enterprizing, but unfriended young authour, beware of relying on the plausibility of booksellers; when they initiate him into dangerous, and delusive labour. Let him be guarded against their selfishness, and little tyranny, by Dr. Johnson's *true* character of them; before he made his complaisant, and corrupt recantation; and let his honest bluntness expunge, and atone for his flattery. Let us not forget the fate of his Dryden; the mortifications which he suffered from his Egyptian task-masters; let us not forget “the mercantile ruggedness of that  
“race, to which the delicacy of the poet  
“was sometimes exposed.”

Dr. Gregory, whose mind could not see, and feel the superlative excellence of his hero; and who was, therefore, very ill qualified to write his life, and to comment on his works, in a paragraph too mean for quotation, attempts, though with evident hesitation, and consciousness of a bad cause; and with feeble, and futile sophistry, to apologize for Mr. Walpole's neglect of the poetical adventurer. He makes the inattention of that honourable gen-



tleman to Chatterton more excusable as literature was not protected by the state. *This* is the very reason that would have determined a generous man who possessed a large fortune, and was animated with an unaffected love of letters, to seize an opportunity of befriending genius, contending with difficulties;—to seize an opportunity of practically resenting the stupid, and barbarous negligence of statesmen. Dr. Gregory, as a biographer, and a critick, does not demand very serious, and elaborate attention: in the prosecution, however, of my observations on this memorable subject, I shall take some notice of the new, and accommodating morality which he hath invented, in favour of the great.

I shall now enter on the more immediate objects of critical disquisition. And I enter on them with some apprehension; lest I should unwarily be discredited by that ignorance of interesting objects; by that pedantry, self-conceit, and desertion of common sense, by which criticks are often ignominiously distinguished. It will be *my* particular duty carefully to avoid these unamiable, and despicable

qualities; as I think that I have a right freely to censure the persons who have shown them in their writings; especially when they are so insensible to their own insignificance as to treat exalted merit with insolence, and contempt.

A part of my critical attention I must give to Mr. Bryant. That gentleman drove through all the absurdities of the supposition that the beautiful, and astonishing fictions of Thomas Chatterton were the productions of a real Thomas Rowley. Surely I may be certain that no credit is *now* given to those absurdities. It will not, however, be unconnected with my plan, nor unimportant to my audience, to take a view of the reveries; of the weak sophistry; and indeed of the evidently disingenuous representations of Mr. Bryant. Such a view will show what a disproportionate consequence, men, who, perhaps, have been naturally modest, will take to themselves, from the accidental, and unaccountable acquisition of a considerable character in the republic of letters:—it will show, in what a profundity of sinking mere erudition lies, when it is compared with the force, and

manly direction of reason; with generous, and noble sentiment; and with the full display of these properties, by the powers of original, and sublime genius. It will teach us to spurn that authority which has merely the superficial, and temporary sanction of mode; not the infallible, and eternal verdict of nature;—it will contribute to teach us an ardent, and practical benevolence;—it will prompt us, on every fair occasion, to exert our utmost power to rescue human excellence, of whatever kind, from the load of misfortunes, and obstructions, with which it may be depressed; and to redeem it into open, and propitious day. By *this* view, we may be warned against those prejudices which are hostile to all momentous truth; we may more deeply discern, and more justly value those objects which deserve the deliberate attention of the mind: and thus we may improve in the knowledge of literary elegance, and in the practice of exalted virtue.

I shall always endeavour to write from the honest impression with which my immediate subject is fixed in my mind. I had occasion, many years ago, to address

Mr. Bryant, on a weak, and absurd construction, which he had obtruded on the first stanza of Mr. Pope's beautiful, and sublime *Universal Prayer*. In my letter to him, on that subject, I treated him with the greatest respect. I gave him liberal credit for the esteem in which he was held by society, and I loved the book in which the preposterous criticism was contained: it was well written; and in defence of the Christian religion. In his observations on the poems of his fancied Rowley, he gave me a picture of himself extremely different from that which was presented in his former book. In those observations, he sunk extremely, as a writer; we may account for this descent by the disparity of his subjects. In his former work he defended a rational, and substantial; in his latter, he maintained a whimsical, and chimerical cause. Many parts of this work, too, were necessarily disgusting, and provoking, to a friend of ingenuous learning, and of mankind. They are marked with a pride in petty, scholastick attainments; with hasty, and dogmatical assertions, unsupported by literary judgement, and taste; and with a



coldness, and inhumanity, (totally repugnant to the Christian faith of the authour) to prodigious genius; under the severest frowns of Fortune; and under the tragical effects of its own despair. My mind, too, was differently actuated, from the different fate of the two poets. Pope's immortality was founded upon a rock; it could not be affected by a capricious quibble; the dawn of Chatterton's fame yielded a dubious light; it was depressed by dark clouds; like the rising life of the authour. And Mr. Bryant was industrious to draw over it an impenetrable, and eternal shade. The fortune of Pope was as prosperous as can be hoped; that of Chatterton, as horrible as can be feared. Hence arose my gentle sentiments, in the *one* case; and my ardent emotions, in the *other*; and if the fair exhibition of these two contrasted poetical images are not decisively eloquent, in my favour, it would be superfluous to say more in my vindication.

Before I more directly apply my observations to Mr. Bryant's critical theory; and before I give my quotations from it, I

shall beg leave to remind you of some characteristicks of an antiquary.

An antiquarian is a being of a most depraved appetite; he prefers the husks, and the refuse, to the spirit, and the pith of learning. This inordinate preference originates from a nature which is at war with elegance, taste, and imagination. The more remote, and uncouth the objects of his researches *are*, the more eagerly he investigates them; and the more highly he prizes them when they are found. It is his pride; it is his glory, to know what none but himself knows; and what none but he, and his fraternity would *wish* to know. He would have more pleasure in recovering the dullest old authour from Herculaneum, than in hearing that *another* person had found all the lost books of Livy. No celebrated genius hath equalled the self-importance of this little creature; who confounds the successful drudgery that ascertains the meaning of the most insignificant word in the most uninteresting passage of a great poet, with the composition of a *Paradise Lost*. Emboldened by this infa-

tuating self-importance, if the most absurd crotchet strikes his childish fancy, he violently persues it, in spite of the most awful interdicts of the temple of Apollo:—enamoured of his little object, which eludes, while it attracts him, he indiscriminately, and precipitately persues it over profane, and consecrated ground; inflexible to argument; sacrilegious to fame. In his delirious fever, he breaks through the monuments of elegant art; he drives over the flowers, and laurels of Parnassus; like his brother knight-errant, in the ironical poem, while he persues “the emperour of Morocco.”—To speak in a more plain, and definitive language; when he is determined to fabricate; or *forge* his arbitrary, and wild conjectures into facts, he rudely insults the most elevated talents; he shakes off the restrictions of honesty; and he hardens his heart against the feelings of humanity.

This man *must* use terms like other writers, though he is treating of objects of which he has no just perception: therefore, when he is criticizing a poetical passage, he will tell you that it is *beautiful*, or *sublime*, or *below mediocrity*. I must

*insist* that he can have no just *perception*; for he has no just *feeling*, of these poetical qualities. How can *he* pretend to elucidate, and illustrate the master-strokes of genius; the tenour of whose criticism is cold, and verbal; who never wrote *one* elegant, and animated period; and from the languor, and confusion of whose comments, we may certainly infer that he neither felt, nor knew the hallowed ground which he profaned? How can *he* presume to admire, and distinguish burning pages, who never caught a spark from the fire of his authour? He may, indeed, skim over the surface; he may scramble among the vehicles of poetry; but he will always be unacquainted with its soul, and essence; as a late right honourable senator *was* with the idea of blushing, in the opinion of Junius; with which idea that poignant writer asserts that he was no more conversant than a man born blind was with scarlet, or sky-blue.

And yet *such* men, with an air of superiority; with an arrogant, and presumptuous disdain, have corrected, and reprehended celebrated poets, who with sensible, and spirited notes had illustrated *other*



poets, and who were worthy of their great authours; as criticks, they were congenial with a Longinus, a Dryden, and a Burke. Those dull pedants had irreverently forgotten the well-known remark of “the great high-priest of all the nine,” whom I have now mentioned; and who asserted (and with justice, in *complete* propriety) that “no man is fit to comment upon a poet *but* a poet.”

I should be wanting in the respect which I owe you; I should defeat my own aim, if I oppressed you with Gothick erudition; with verbal opium. Yet I shall request your attention to some passages of Mr. Bryant’s book, on a subject which was *once* so much controverted; but on which I trust that *now*, there can be little dispute. The book is entitled, “Observations upon the Poems of Thomas Rowley, in which the authenticity of those poems is ascertained.”—The title is characteristick of the performance; it consists of hasty confidence, and false assertion. Yet the specimens that I shall give you from this work of labour, and perplexity, will not be without their use: they will show you, among many other

instances, that particular men may be fortunate beyond their deserts, in the acquisition both of literary, and moral fame: to the mind they will be guards against imposing appearances; they will prevent it from being led into great errors, by specious, but illegitimate authority. I must present the features of one or two more of the critical, and antiquarian tribe:—when I have taken my leave of *these* disgusting objects; of this Tartarus of the spirits of tormented words; I hope that you will accompany me into the Elysian Fields of Chatterton; in which I have no doubt that *his* vindicated, and beatified soul enjoys eternal felicity. In the reptile, man, we find a little envious, malignant, and tyrannical being; industrious to depress *others* that it may raise *itself*. In the Deity we may behold, with gratitude, and pleasure ineffable, a being who is as good, as he is wise, and great; a being, the divinely accurate, and complete economy of whose justice, paternally penetrating the whole constitution, and frame of man, largely remunerates his virtues; and tenderly allows for his faults. Man, from his very narrow, and weak

understanding, is a partial, and uncharitable judge; from his very limited power, he has a jealous, and despotick disposition: but the omnipotence as well as the omniscience of God, make him a God of the most expanded mercy.

It is the opinion, or rather the dogma of Mr. Bryant, that the poems of his Rowley were written in provincial dialects; and particularly in the old Scotch dialect. The latter fancy he attempts to support by many references to Gawin Douglas's translation of the *Æneid*. Nothing can be more improbable, and absurd than this hypothesis. It would, indeed, be very convenient for all the rest of his unsupported theory; and if it was at all favoured by any facts, or circumstances, in the constant history of literature, it might seem, but even *then*, only to superficial observers, to lessen the incredibility of that theory.—How happily this hypothesis accommodates Mr. Bryant, must be evident to every one. It gives him the range of provinces; of kingdoms; which, indeed, every wild-goose chase demands. I have no doubt that the penetrating mind of Chatterton foresaw what food he was

preparing for the coarse maw of rapacious antiquarians; of the Bryants, and the Milleses, of his time; and that he, very fairly, amused himself with the idea. Hence his unparalleled ingenuity, if we consider his age, and his opportunities of acquiring knowledge, in imitating our old language; and in fabricating terms extremely like it; but of which they never made a part. In favour of *these* gentlemen, he raised a ghost, of the existence of which it was the interest of *their* critical superstition to support the belief. If the real Chatterton is protected by common sense, and taste, they give him no refuge; no quarter. They persue, and hunt him down, with the fury of a Nimrod; if he has recourse to the doubles of a hare, they wind him; if he outruns the stretch of a fox, they overtake him. They have qualified themselves to hunt through counties, and through kingdoms: to-day they are in Somersetshire: to-morrow, in Yorkshire, and in Durham; and on the day following, in the heart of Scotland. In short, they drive “to Greenland, Zem-  
 “bla, or the Lord knows where.”—They are determined to bury poor Chatterton



in eternal oblivion. With a frantick, and unrelenting chace, the archeological necromancers continually earth him, and start their phantom in his stead. They raise Archbishop Turgott, and Bishop Douglas from the dead; and impress them into the chace; *these* holy men, by the force of diabolical magick, renounce their integrity, and consecrate the spectre.

Many of the words in the poems of this chimerical Rowley are used by Chaucer. But Chaucer was conversant with our great metropolis; he was politely, and highly educated himself; and he had the most intimate social connexions with persons of the first rank, and education in the kingdom. Is it possible that *he* could have had so vitiated, and depraved a taste; and so preposterous a judgement, as not to have been carefully attentive, in his writings, to the most legitimate, and elegant language that was afforded by the times? Is it not still a grosser absurdity to suppose that Rowley, a man of a miraculous mind, who anticipated the philological and poetical elegance, and harmony of three centuries after himself (*this* may be asserted, *often* of his lan-

guage; almost *always* of his versification) is it not still a grosser absurdity to suppose that *he* would deign to adopt the harshness, and vulgarity of provincial dialects? I am now going to mention an eminent man, whose example alone, if we had not many others, is sufficient to explode the ostentatious critical doctrine of Mr. Bryant, of the indispensable necessity of a regular scholastick education, to form, and to produce genius. It was very natural for Mr. Robert Burns, (whose death well deserved our grief;) with the prejudices, and habits which had grown up with *him*, in his native country;—it was very natural for *him* to incorporate into several of his poetical productions, the old words, and pronunciation, that were commonly used in Scotland. I am far from meaning to reproach his memory: in the limited, and unworthy sphere in which *he* had moved, those prejudices, and habits were almost unavoidable; they were, therefore, very excusable; nay, they might be amiable; in *some* instances, they indicate a weak, and ungenerous mind; but in others, they may be the concomitants of a great soul; of a Robert Burns; riveted

to the domestick, and tender affections; and ardent for the publick good. But to return to the tenour of my argument Mr. Pope was a prodigy in early genius; and it grew, and matured, as he began; in force of mind he equalled his father, Dryden; in elegance, and poetical musick (the most delightful of all musick) he far excelled him. In improving our English poetry, he made a large, an astonishing progress; he marked it, he raised, and beautified it, with a new, and prominent æra. But the steps of Mr. Pope were the steps of a child, in comparison with the giant-steps of Mr. Bryant's Rowley; he was an infant to *him* (if, indeed, this fine monster had ever existed) in the powers which beautify, and aggrandize: yet what can be more ridiculous nonsense than to suppose that Pope would have professedly written in the idiom of Gawin Douglas, or of Robert Burns?

I think that it must now be evident that the absurdity of supposing that this imaginary poet wrote in provincial dialects can only be exceeded by the serious, and elaborate belief in his existence. It is certain that he would, least of all, write in

the Scotch dialect; in the style, or idiom of Gawin Douglas; which was not, properly, a provincial dialect; but the vernacular language, or rather the mode of speaking an established language, that was peculiar to a nation; to an independent kingdom; which had been long governed by its own laws, and customs, and by its own monarchs. It was likewise divided from England by strong, and violent national prejudices, and antipathies; which, I hope that I may now, with truth, observe, have been mitigated, or annihilated, by the lenient, but victorious hand of Time. I have only revived the remembrance of these particulars, to show, that it was impossible for an English poet, miraculously informed, and elegant, of the fifteenth century, to write in the idiom of Scotland; if we rationally reflect on his literature, taste, and local situation.

Spenser's pretended use of the Somersetshire dialect is of no service to the cause of Mr. Bryant. In his Pastorals he *affects* a rustick dialect; he adopts the *real* dialect of *no* county. It is with regret that I utter a word of censure against a great, and venerable poet, of a powerful genius;



of a most exuberant imagination. But his taste was not so good as his fancy was glowing, and expansive. He wrote in a style that was antiquated, even in the reign of Elizabeth; and even *that* style he tortured with his own peculiar affectations: hence Ben Jonson, that learned critick as well as poet, boldly asserts that “he wrote “no language.”

It is well known that the Romans were solicitously attentive (more than any other people; perhaps more than the Greeks, their boasted masters) to improve, and polish their language: their *literary* was as active as their *warlike* ambition; and by its ardour, impelling the natural greatness, and magnificence of their minds, by which they formed and executed all their plans, in a manner unattained by other nations; their language, at length, in energy, and perfection, became the first language in the world. Their poets, and historians, availed themselves of the captivating powers which they inherited from their ancestors; they were emulous to write in the finest, and most impressive classical purity, and elegance; they were the faithful depositaries of the intellectual

as well as warlike honours of their country. They never deigned to write but in the fixed, and most approved Roman language: they scorned to disgrace the conflicts for liberty; the triumphs of the capitol, with vulgar phraseology; with provincial barbarity.

Nor do I think that the use of the various dialects of ancient Greece, by *her* celebrated authours, gives any weight, in the eye of reason, and sound judgement, to Mr. Bryant's hypothesis of provincial writing. Both Asiatick, and European Greece, in their free, and best days; before ambition, and tyranny had destroyed their liberty, and enervated their learning, were divided, *not* into provinces, but into independent states. The dialects of the different states made a part of their established, and polite language: in *them*, therefore, their most liberal, and best educated societies conversed; in *them* their orators, poets, and historians wrote; and dignified by these authorities, they were adopted by elegant, and sublime genius, over all Greece. Besides these dialects, I doubt not that there was,—I will call it, if you please, a language of the

vulgar, and lowest inhabitants of Greece; for such an unwarranted, and rustick oral intercourse hardly deserves the name of a language. It was distinguished from the genuine, and polished Greek of the respective communities, rather by the abuses of pronunciation than by absolutely different words. Analogous to this distinction are the vulgar habits of conversation, in the civilized countries of modern times; the various dialects of the counties of England; of the shires of Scotland; of the patois of France, and of Italy, essentially correspond with this description. To their proper company they were confined; they were never admitted to mix with the elevated strain of a polite, and accomplished poet; except in the fancy of a puerile critick; who was determined to drag aside the heaviest impediments that stood in the way of *him*, and the literary toy of which he was enamoured.

The inferiour strength of my arguments will be greatly corroborated by a quotation from a note of Mr. Tyrwhitt, in the vindication of his Appendix to his edition of the Works of Chatterton. The criticism is equally ingenious, perspicuous,

and incontrovertible. “ Spenser’s provincialities are evidently affected; and not deducible from *any* natural dialect. The translation of the *Æneis* by Gawin Douglas, is, indeed, as Mr. Bryant says, entirely provincial; but can he be serious when he adds that—‘ much of the same language is to be found in the poems attributed to Rowley; and, therefore, that no book can be applied preferable to this, in order to authenticate those poems; either in respect to orthography, or style?’—If this were so, one might be led to conclude, either that the dialects of Scotland, and Somersetshire, were very similar; or that Rowley resided, and was probably born in the former, rather than in the latter district: but without coming to any conclusion, at present, I would wish the reader to compare part of a stanza, which Mr. Bryant, in his 434th page, has quoted from Gawin Douglas, with an equal number of lines in Rowley; and judge himself, how the two writers agree in orthography, and style.”—*Vindication*: p. 5. note.

This gentleman, in a series of sensible,



and decisive observations, has refuted, to moral demonstration, the conceits of Mr. Bryant, and of the Dean of Exeter; he has evinced their weak, obstinate, and disingenuous defence of an extravagant, and ridiculous opinion. And thus he has exempted me (for your generous expectations may be disappointed by my inability, but not by my indolence) from the toil of examining much thorny, and painful erudition; in which, I cheerfully own that Mr. Tyrwhitt is my master, with an infinite superiority. He is as rational, and accurate, as the two gentlemen, his opponents, are absurd, vague, and inconclusive. I sincerely regret that my honest praise must be succeeded by serious, and warm expostulation. It is a tribute which I owe to the manes of the great departed; it is an act of justice which I owe to myself. I wish that Mr. Tyrwhitt had shown himself as impartial, generous, and humane a man, as he is a just, and acute critick. To little *Anonymous*, who was the aide de camp to the two generals, Bryant, and Milles; and who fell in the battle, he shows a religious, a superstitious tenderness;—to *him* he applies the

monastick dotage, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. If this idea, Mr. Tyrwhitt, extracted from your breast every sting of censure against *that* insignificant creature; ought it not to have restrained you from repeatedly heaping opprobrious, and ignominious terms;—I will venture to say, ill-grounded calumnies, on the ashes of Chatterton? Your excess of severity to *him*, and of adulation to *others*, are equally reprehensible. With what sincerity could you tell us that “whatever” came from Mr. Bryant was valuable;”—at the very time when you were obliging the publick by annihilating his critical futility; by detecting his critical duplicity? Indeed, you present uniform, and undistinguishing complaisance, and praise, to *him*, and to Dr. Milles; though you yourself have exposed (and you could not do otherwise, when you seriously, and attentively wrote against them) their errors; their blunders; their gross absurdities; and their literary dishonesty. Sir, if imposture was applicable to the youth, whom I shall ever lament, it was applicable to *them*; and from a *worse* disposition, as I hope to prove, with regard to the effects of the different impositions, the criticks are

*annihilated*, in the comparison. Chatterton, if you will, with the gloom of a Pharisee, call him an *impostor*, was an impostor in light, and glory; in that beauty which captivates the heart; in that sublimity which exalts the soul; but those gentlemen, at once your antagonists, and friends, are impostors in little quirks, and evasions; in serious, and deliberate falsehoods; to gratify a petty passion; in the puny triumphs of dullness over murdered words, and syllables; triumphs, in which dullness alone can delight.

One reason for Mr. Tyrwhitt's gentle treatment of *Anonymous*, was, that, in his pamphlet, he had shown "much candour, and good manners." The image of the great, but poor, and distressed Chatterton, called for more liberality from the critick; for more moral generosity from the man;—for *he* was a magnanimous being;—so singularly magnanimous, that he praised Walpole, after he had used him basely; and when he expected no favour from him. I am under a necessity of explaining words of daily occurrence, even to professedly verbal criticks. I have endeavoured to give the full

signification of the word, *abuse*; let me give you the complete import of the word, *candour*.—Candour, then, to interpret it concisely, signifies not only a mildness, and gentleness; but likewise, an impartiality; a plainness, and openness of disposition; a direct avowal, and defence of truth, on every pressing occasion; controuled only by the fear of God; and perfectly unembarrassed with any servile fear, or convenient respect of man. *This* definition is illustrated by the Latin fountain of the English word; for it signifies *clearness*, and *brightness*; and it implies a perfect transparency of our *thoughts*, and *words*.

If then I have, on *this*, and on other occasions, written with the utmost sincerity, and frankness; when my subjects demanded the exercise of these qualities; regardless of the fortune of my interest; and of the frowns of power; and if I have always exerted my humble, but ingenuous abilities, with a particular warmth, and intrepidity, when they were excited by weakness, and distress, on *one* hand; and by tyranny, and oppression, on the *other*;—I shall be *so far* satisfied with my-



self; I shall think that I have kept a firm allegiance to *true candour*; and to the *best good manners*;—not to that candour, and to those good manners, with which deceitful criticks, with war in their hearts, to gratify an unmanly pride, soothe, and cajole one-another;—not to that candour, and to those good manners, which never scruple to injure a helpless individual, while they retain the smiles of a vain, and powerful world; but to the candour, and good manners, of a more aspiring spirit; of a moral elevation; to the candour, and good manners, which never praise, or blame, but at the command of justice; and which would, at any time, vindicate the insulted merit, or plead for the neglected woes, of *one*, at the risk of offending *many*.

Mr. Bryant takes an unbounded range for his critical adventures: he gives a part of the poems which are under the name of his Rowley, to several authours, and to very early times. He traces them even to the twelfth century; to the reign of Richard the First. Mr. Bryant is as romantick a crusader in letters, as that prince was in arms. The bait that was

caught by an appetite eager to devour impossibilities, was thrown out for it, by the varied ingenuity, and by the inexhaustible genius of Chatterton. By our poetical Proteus his forms were changed with ease; and they were assimilated to nature. Encumbered with the weight of his antique dress, he sometimes threw it off, that his cotemporaries might be more forcibly struck with his personal elegance; with his polished graces. There is a great disparity in the appearance of the old English, in the poems which have been attributed to Rowley. For example, in the *Bristowe Tragedie*, or the *Dethe of Sir Charles Bawdin*; a pathetick, and beautiful poem of 392 lines, there are not more than six words to which a mere modern English reader will want a glossary.

But I am persuaded that our youthful bard, who was endowed with an equal strength, and versatility of talents, was a prophet as well as a poet. He not only foresaw the entertainment which his poetry would give to polite scholars; and the admiration which it would receive from *them*; but likewise the doubts; the dis-

putes; the pretended discoveries; the inglorious victories which it would procure, for more grave, and saturnine men; for men of musty habits, and dark researches. It was in *his* plan, to actuate sentiment, and to charm imagination, in feeling, and excursive minds; but he likewise meant (and his intention had all its effects) to stimulate dullness, and to enliven torpor; to rouze, and to agitate the phlegm of the antiquary.

The dissimilar verbal structure of these poems suggested very useful inferences to Mr. Bryant; it supplied him with aids which were extremely favourable to *his* irregular sallies, and bold invasions; it gave him a diversity of persons; a range of countries; an expanse of ages; by *this* fortunate source, he has auxiliaries ready to support him, at a moment's notice—auxiliaries of terrifick powers, and of awful names;—the pious Turgott, Pierce Ploughman;—Robert of Gloucester; an infinite number of poetical worthies, completely clad in old armour, are always ready to take the field, under *his* mystick banner. Of every height; of every depth, in the regions of fancy, *he* has taken pos-

session; and thus he can form, and extend, as he pleases, his critical *cordon* of posts, observation, and defence, in the war of books “militant here on earth.”

I have hitherto principally taken a general view of Mr. Bryant’s capacity, attainments, and resources, as an antiquarian; I shall now immediately address him, as a verbal critick, or philologist.

He has given us two prolix, and tedious octavo-volumes, in which he professes minutely to criticize the words which are only to be found in the poems of Chatterton; or which *he* has applied to a particular sense. Yet it is remarkable that he omits to take any notice of many of those words. It is yet more remarkable that on *some* of them he makes a few superficial, cursory observations; then drops them; and tells us that he will investigate them more deliberately hereafter. But the promised investigations never appear; our Alpheus sinks in Saxony; but he appears not again in Britain. Of his discriminating acuteness I shall now give you a specimen; or a *sample*;—to use his own favourite expression; to speak in his *Aldermanick* style,



The third Eclogue of Chatterton, or Rowley, begins with these lines:—

Wouldst thou kenn Nature in her better parte?  
Goe, serche the *logges*, and *bordels* of the hynde.

“ There is certainly a mistake” (says Mr. Bryant) “ in the second verse: for  
“ the plural *logges* is a dissyllable, and  
“ makes a fault in the *rythm*. Besides,  
“ in those times, an hind had but *one*  
“ lodge, or bordel; and he was perhaps  
“ well off to have *that*. Even now we  
“ never speak of the cottages of the shep-  
“ herd, nor of the huts of the labourer.  
“ The passage, therefore, for the sake of  
“ metre, and of sense, should be cor-  
“ rected; and the words rendered lodge,  
“ and bordel, in the singular:

Goe, serche the *logge*, and *border* of the hynde.

“ That is, go, look into the weather-  
“ boarded cottage of the peasant.”—  
Bryant: p. 83.

The *logges*, and the *bordels*, signify the lodgings, and the cottages of the hind. *Aloggit* signifies lodged, in Chaucer. In

examining *this* instance of sagacious, and masterly criticism, I must first observe that Chatterton undoubtedly meant that we should pronounce the plural, *logges*, as *one* syllable; and *he* understood the art, as well as the spirit of verse, better than Mr. Bryant, with all his *rythm*.—He likewise commits a gross, and palpable error, in asserting that the addition of the plural *s*, makes the word a dissyllable: to make it *one* syllable, in the plural number; and consequently to pronounce it *loggs*, is agreeable to the general analogy, ancient as well as modern, of the use of English words, of a similar structure, and of a similar grammatical distinction. In *either* analogy, the *e*, at the end of the *singular* number, by no means co-operates with the *s*, to make the *plural* a dissyllable. As to the *hynde*, *that* expression, as it is connected with the rest of the line, has, as clearly, and obviously, a plural, and collective signification, as the word *people*, or *commonwealth*, or *society*; or any other words, which bring a plural, or collective sense, more prominently, but not more distinctly, to our view. If I should say that we are apt to despise the

poor man; would any person who had passed the *threshold* of the august fabrick of the English language, imagine, that I meant any one particular poor man, and not the *poor*, in general? Mr. Bryant says that “even now, we never speak of the “cottages of the shepherd; nor of the “huts of the labourer.” Surely we may use these expressions with perfect propriety: and whenever we *may* use them, we shall speak better English than is sometimes written by Mr. Bryant; whose style is frequently coarse, and vulgar; and I may venture to add, ungrammatical. I should never have pressed him so closely, if he had not disdainfully undervalued the power of extraordinary talents to form the great, and distinguished author. Of this often exemplified truth he had an almost miraculously shining proof before him; if, like an owl, he had not shut his eyes against a flood of day. I would never have pressed him so closely, if he had not presumed to shoot his *fretfull quills* of Latin, and Greek, against the vigorous, and sublime pinion; against the variegated, and celestial plumage, of the Muse. Chatterton is, almost, on every

occasion, treated by Mr. Bryant with a superlative contempt. The true poetical believers are often reminded of the ignorant, and illiterate boy of Bristol. And he tells us that it was very easy for some persons whom he mentions, and who must have been very inadequate judges of rising intellectual merit, to estimate the talents of a *poor charity-boy*: as if poor mental abilities necessarily resulted from a poor station; as if Fortune could defeat the eternal power of the Almighty; and make a mind *little*, which he had made to be *great*. The prose of Chatterton is far more elegant, and spirited than that of his hard, and dry censor, by whom it is despised; and who peremptorily insists that he had neither time, nor opportunities, to acquire literary knowledge, or to form his taste by reading. Before I answer *this* assertion, I shall observe, that it is not in the power of Mr. Bryant to produce an instance of Chatterton's ignorance of the common use of the English language, so palpable, and glaring, as that which *he* shows, in his own remarks on "the logges, and bordels  
"of the hynde."—I shall now observe



that genius is a fine, and a lofty object: that it is beyond the sight of pur-blind intellects; and that it is of a most vivaciously active; of a most energetically plastic nature; and that it can do for *itself* what schools, and colleges cannot do for *thousands*. *This* is my text; *Chatterton* is my comment. Conscious of his innate powers (for they worked wonderfully in him, almost from his cradle) and already fired with a thirst for knowledge, and for glory; when he was eight years old, he expended the little pocket-money which was allowed him by his mother, on reading from a circulating library. At ten years of age, he made a catalogue (which has been unfortunately lost) of the books which he had read; they amounted to seventy. I doubt not that the choice of those books was as judicious as the extent of the reading was surprizing; when we consider his circumstances, and situation. From that period to the time of his death, without ever encroaching on his obligations of business, he lost not a moment that *day*, that *night* could afford him, in prosecuting literary application, and exertion, with an Athenian spirit, and with

a Lacedæmonian temperance. Mr. Bryant repeatedly asserts that Chatterton's access to books must have been very limited. I do not see the force of this assertion. Bristol is one of the largest, and most opulent towns in England; and though it is a commercial town, it undoubtedly has a great number of useful, and excellent books; of many of which the assiduity, and ardour, and interesting manner of Chatterton might easily obtain the perusal. Many people will gratify the *reading*, who will not relieve the *starving* man. Therefore I am convinced that our unfortunate youth was astonishingly learned, for his years. I am not speaking of the externals, I am speaking of the essence of learning: I am speaking of that instructive, rich, and various knowledge (perhaps it is more advantageously acquired from *one* language than from *many*) which is the strengthening, and salutary food of a vigorous, comprehensive, and elegant mind: a food which becomes coalescent, and connatural with the constitution of that mind; spontaneously, and genially blends with its operations; actuates, and impells its nerves;

gives the mild, or the animated glow to its colours; the soft, or the majestick air to its graces.—Yes;—I am speaking of the spirit, of the soul of learning;—moderate, indeed, is my comparative estimate of its appendages, of its apparel; though it be of the golden tissue of Greece, and Rome. This best of learning grew up with Chatterton; the magnitude of his genius had room to play in the extent of his information. Shall I not endeavour to vindicate the wrongs of such an injured being as *this*?—Shall I not *justly* return the terms of reproach, and contempt, to infinitely inferiour beings, who *unjustly* aspersed, and presumed to *despise* him;—who insulted, and profaned his memory, with uncharitable censures; with flaming anathemas? Forgive this digression: it arose, I hope, not unnaturally, from the critical objects by which it was suggested. I shall now descend from Chatterton, to converse again with Mr. Bryant alone. To mix in the fray of his logomachy; to survey the pictures, and images of his adulterated, and spurious taste, may not be without its use: by exposing the insignificance, the folly, of minute, anatomical criticism; by

showing the errors, the deformities of a *false*, and *vulgar* taste; we may the more justly value, we may the more accurately distinguish, the *true*.

In the beginning of the *Battle of Hastings*, the poet addresses the sea, in these words;—

O! sea! our teeming donore! &c.

This is a very poetical mode of expression; and it is very intelligible; its meaning is obvious, at this day. But Mr. Bryant, finding, as I suppose, that *donore* was too modern a term for the fifteenth century, or rather for the time of *Turgott*, and *William Rufus*, according to *his* incredible conjecture; first makes honourable mention of Mr. Tyrwhitt's improvement of the invocation; and then proposes his own. "Mr. 'Tyrwhitt" (says our critick) "thinks that instead of "*O! sea! our teeming donore!*—the true "*reading was, O! sea-o'er-teeming Do-ver!*" Why Mr. Tyrwhitt, who was convinced that Rowley was an imaginary being, and who is, in general, a good critick, should have exposed himself in this



ridiculous manner, I cannot imagine. Of his pretended correction I own that I can make no sense: but Mr. Bryant thinks it “a very ingenious alteration, and highly “probable.” So it *is*; if to be absurd is to be ingenious; and if high probability, and extreme *improbability* convey the same idea. The general inflexibility of verbal criticks never *bends* but when they *bow* to one another. After his compliment to Mr. Tyrwhitt, he proceeds:—“But instead of forming a decompound” (and a monstrous one it *is*) “I should “rather separate the second term, and “read, *O sea! o’er-teeming Dover!*”—by which he would mean, *o’er-flowing* Dover;—though the word, *teeming*, in *his* fabricated compound, rejects the sense to which *he* would force it, after all the cutting, and chopping of our literary Procrustes. In his observations on the whole passage, he dashes with his usual boldness; he discovers in it a reference to a terrible inundation, which happened in the reign of William Rufus, and overwhelmed Dover, and many other places on the southern coast of our island: (though no man would have made the

discovery but himself).—He concludes that “the first sketch of the Battle of Hastings was produced by *Turgott*,” who lived at the very time to which he *creates* a reference.—The whole chain of conjectures purely imaginary, on this invocation to the sea, is displayed from the 404th to the 408th page of Mr. Bryant’s learned lucubrations on the poems of Thomas Rowley. Before I take leave of this critical tournament, I must observe, that in consequence of Mr. Tyrwhitt’s emendation;—in consequence of his decompound, and distorted epithet;—*O sea-o’er-teeming Dover!* the fancy of the poet must have been as unnatural as the wild conceits of his commentators; for he must have imagined that *Dover*, not the *sea*, would have risen, and sunk, with a dreadfully portentous deluge:

Thou wouldst have rose, and sunk, wyth tydes of bloude.

This verse is a continuation of the poet’s address to the sea; and it is the very second line after, “*O sea! our teeming donore!*”—In all Mr. Bryant’s catalogue of Chatterton’s errours, and inconsisten-

ces, are there *any* so monstrous, so ridiculous as *this*? He pays a compliment to the ingenuity of Mr. Tyrwhitt, for a blunder, of which, if it had been committed by the poor charity-boy of Bristol, he would have expressed his contempt, with all the pride of pedantry; with all the flint of insensibility:—I should have said, if he could have *perceived* it; for by not taking notice of it;—nay, by praising it, he more than *recommitted* the blunder himself.

After some previous remarks, I shall select from Mr. Bryant's magazine of heaped, and promiscuous criticism, a curious observation, which will not only show his taste in *poetical*, but in *human* beauty; it will convince us that while he is elegant in his choice of words, he is an elegant *formarum spectator*.

The majestick beauty of the fair Kenevalcha, the wife of the valiant Adhelm, is represented by an original simile, in the second canto of the *Battle of Hastings*:—

As the blue Bruton risynge from the wave,  
Like sea-gods seeme, in most majestic guise;  
And rounde aboute the risynge waters lave;  
And their longe hayre arounde their bodie flies;

Such majestie was in *her* porte displaid;  
 To be excelld bie none but Homer's martial maid.

Battle of Hastings: Ild. Part. v. 395.

To one capital observation on colour, taken from the school of Titian, or of Reubens, I shall particularly beg your attention. But in my way to it, I shall take notice of some inferiour objects. Here our stern critick once more animadverts on the supposed ignorance of poor Chatterton, the humble, and illiterate transcriber of *his* Rowley. *Bruton*, he says, should have been *Brutons*, as it is immediately connected with plural verbs. But this alteration is by no means necessary. *Bruton* is here used in a collective sense, like the bordels of the *hynde*; and as their *bodie* is used, in this very passage, for their *bodies*. I do not say that this mode of expression is right, in more cultivated, and modern language; I mean, the *Bruton*, preceding a plural verb: but whoever is, at all acquainted with our old writers, knows that grammar is often more grossly violated by *them* than it is in *this* instance.

The word *risynge* repeated after a slight



interval, offends the delicate gentleman. With equal delicacy he therefore proposes that instead of *risynge*, in the third line, we should read, *swixing*: for to *swixe*, he tells us (and I know no more of this Attic word than what he tells us) “denotes the “sound of waters, either running, or “otherwise put in motion.”—Bryant; p. 264. I will not formally impeach this word; but whether it would be better to endure the sound of *rising*, twice, or of *swixing* once, let the taste of my audience determine.

This passage gives Mr. Bryant a fine opportunity of entering into a learned dissertation on the custom of the old Britons of painting their bodies with *glas-tum*, or *woade*. On that dissertation I should be loth to dwell. Our critick observes that “Kenewalcha, as a beauty “must be supposed to have had fine hair; “and all persons of a delicate texture, “have, from the blueness of their veins, “an azure tint communicated to their “complexions.”—P. 266. He seems to be enamoured of this barbarous blue taste of our ancestors. I do not think that the Grand Signior would have chosen Mr.

Bryant for his *arbiter elegantiarum*: I am sure that *I* would *not*, if I was a Sultan. Let the cerulean tint adorn the veins, and the eyes of the fair, in the name of nature, and of charms; but let it not presume to encroach on the limits which are assigned to it by Nature; let it not presume to shade the candour of the lily, and the blush of the rose: if it *does*, Mr. Bryant may take his Kenewalcha to himself, and his blue Brutons along with her. The woade of the old Britons must have injured the beauty of a fine form as much as the notes of an antiquarian critick injure the beauties of a fine poem.

I am not an *indiscriminately* rapturous admirer of any poet; nor do I think this one of the first of Chatterton's similes; though it is as good as many of Homer. In four stanzas immediately following that which the critick has quoted, there are far more beautiful similes applied to Kenewalcha, of which Mr. Bryant takes no notice. In the estimation of *some* judges, the odd, and the grotesque are preferred to the regular; to the elegantly striking. These judges, too, can seldom form a right opinion on objects of taste,

from their prejudices in favour of mere antiquity. As “a saint in crape is twice  
 “a saint in lawn,”—these men, in comparing old, or what they fancy to be old, with modern poetry of equal merit, always find an infinite superiority in the former. Mr. Bryant was under the dominion of these prejudices, when he thus praises the simile which had so powerfully attracted his admiration, in terms which, as far as they exaggerate, are bombast. “There is great beauty as well as propriety, in this similitude; more, perhaps, than may at first appear; and the lines as well as the conception are very noble.—P. 264. He was under the dominion of *these* prejudices, when with a contempt which was equally illiberal, and ignorant; a contempt which showed that he knew nothing *vitally* of poetry, he allowed no merit to the productions which are avowedly Chatterton’s; though they are animated with a spirit, and present pictures congenial with those of his antiquated compositions. The momentous truth of *this* assertion I hope to prove; if there are any just, and general laws in criticism; if there are any fine, and sub-

lime images in poetry; and if we have reason, to estimate, and approve the *one*; and sentiment, to feel, and admire the *other*.

The stanza which contains Mr. Bryant's favourite simile concludes with this line, as the climax of the poet, in praise of Kenewalcha:

To be excelld by none but Homer's martial maid.

Our hypercritick thinks the line too trite, and modern, to be admitted as genuine. You see how the predilection goes: take the rust from the medal, and it is not worth a farthing.

Poor Vadius long with learned spleen devoured,  
Can taste no pleasure since his shield was scoured.

Pope.

The simile of the blue Brutons is inferior to many similes which are despised by Mr. Bryant; I mean, to many similes in the fictitious translations from old Saxon, and British poems, which are contained in Chatterton's miscellanies. But they are not sanctioned with the powerful idea of antiquity; which often *creates* beauties, and *annihilates* faults.



When a critick is peremptory, and self-sufficient, surely *something* of the peremptory is allowable, in return. I shall venture to maintain that the rejected line contains the noblest image in the stanza. But Mr. Bryant, in his critical farrago, wages a constant war against poetical aptitude; poetical elegance; poetical grandeur; and against—Chatterton!

I shall now give some instances of wilful mistakes; from an inordinate passion for mangling an authour, and playing the despot in criticism. It is likewise impossible for the fairest judgement not to ascribe *these* perversions of an authour's meaning, and of his use of words, to a disingenuous disposition.

The second Eclogue in the old language is written on a martial subject; on the victory of Richard the First over the Saracens, in the Holy Land. The minds of the Saracens, agitated, and alarmed, at the sight of the hostile ships, are divided between courage, and apprehension. Their alternate resolution, and hesitation, are thus clearly described;—*clearly*, to every one who is disposed to see distinct images, and to apprehend common sense:

The reyning foemen, thynckeynge gif to dare,  
 Boun the merk swerde; theie seche to fraie;—theie blyn.

That is,—“the enemy running, or advancing fast; yet doubting whether or no they should venture; prepare the dark sword; they seek to fight, or offer battle;—they cease, stop, or stand still.” Nothing can be more indisputable than this evident meaning of the verses. But Mr. Bryant, after many erroneous, and confident remarks, old details, and expressions of contempt, on the transcriber’s ignorance, thus pretends to correct the latter line;

Boun the merk swerde; and seek the faie to blynn.

In quoting, or rather in misrepresenting these lines, he has been guilty, I will not say, of two gross oversights, but of two palpable impositions. He totally omits these words in the former line;—“thynckeynge gif to dare;”—which express the hesitation of the Saracens, and prepare the mind for the close of the latter verse;—“theie seche to fraie;—theie blyn;” which completely, and as clearly

expresses that hesitation. No boasted candour, or critical hypocrisy can draw its unwholesome shade over a deliberate fallacy, in his destruction of this passage. For he gives us the word *fraie*, in the second line, without the *comma* after it, which makes the sense good, and poetical; but without the comma, the words, and the sense, which, if it is retained, it properly divides, become nonsense; or, are laboured into nonsense by Mr. Bryant. He, too, who is so very quick, and magisterial in his animadversions, and corrections, should know that *blynn* is never used, with propriety, in the old English language, but as a neutral verb. This, and much more he ought to know, from the English erudition of his friend, Mr. Tyrwhitt; and I hope that this gentleman's vindication of his Appendix hath, long ago, convinced Mr. Bryant of many great errors which he committed; and of much hasty, and unfounded censure, with which he aspersed the abilities; and I may add, the accuracy, of his despised boy; which were both infinitely superiour to his own. And I may venture to assert, that in *this*, and in every other instance

where he attempts to improve on the author, his false emendations greatly injure, and impair the force of the original text, as we received it from Chatterton. But I have a heavier charge against him than any defects in the critical faculty; a charge which has been often fulminated, and with all the papal terrors, against my unfortunate young hero, by the candour, and good manners of Mr. Bryant, and of other fortunate criticks;—the charge of serious imposition; or of *imposture*; in the favourite, and hackneyed term of the literary synod. For deliberately to mutilate passages; to suppress material parts of their contents;—to make them speak what sentiments, and in what language *we* please; to gratify a scholastic vanity; or to support, and promote a visionary scheme;—is certainly *one* species, and a very selfish, and mean species of imposture. I must here obviate the frowns, and the reprobation of some very candid, polite, and Christian criticks, by desiring them attentively to observe, that I would never have applied the harsh, and uncharitable term, *imposture*, as I have now applied it, with *truth*, and



*justice*, had it not been often, and with less equity, and, I hope, with a rare inhumanity, thrown on the grave of the young, the unfortunate, and the great. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, Mr. Tyrwhitt; you adopted the maxim, when I cannot think that you were particularly obliged to its cautious, and religious observance: why you spared the critical insignificance, and impertinence of *Anonymous*;—why you not only spared but praised Mr. Bryant, though you were well acquainted with that absurdity, and duplicity, which you were even proving, detecting, and refuting, while you spared, and praised him; and why you are altogether *unsparing*; why you show no indulgence, no mercy to the memory of *him*, who was often the subject of weaker conjectures, and arguments than *yours*;—I shall leave to be determined, rather by your contemplative than by your practical distinctions, between just, virtuous, and independent censure, and unwarrantable, partial, and inhuman severity; between honest praise, and servile adulation.

In the last poetical passage of which I have taken a view, Mr. Bryant, as I have

observed, with a wilful, and unfair design, suppresses half of a line,—“*thinc-  
keynge gif to dare;*”—which opens a sentiment that is completed in the following line;—“*theie seche to fraie; theie  
blynn.*”—“Mr. Bryant, in his quotation,” (says Mr. Tyrwhitt) “has omitted the clause,—*thinckeynge gif to dare;*—“*though* it certainly gives light to what follows.”—If Mr. Tyrwhitt had written, *because*, instead of, *though*, he would, for once, have applied to the half-bold, and half-timid deception of a brother antiquarian the reproof which it deserved.

“I think” (says Mr. Bryant) “nothing can show more satisfactorily than this passage, that Chatterton had an original before him which he did not understand.” If *he did* not understand it, Mr. Bryant, *you would* not understand it. Merely not to understand a passage, is surely innocent, according to all right literary laws; but in cases like the present, proudly, and obstinately to *pretend* not to understand it; to pervert its meaning, and to deface its elegance, is, in my humble opinion, according to those laws, highly criminal. You have amply, you

have tediously shown, that you have no taste for poetry; you have no perception of its sense; you have no sensibility to its beauties. It was *you* who had an original before you which you did not understand; you were unworthy of the *substance*; Nature avenged her cause; punished your presumption with a critical delirium; and sent you to hunt a *shade*.—See Bryant; pages 93, 94, 95, 96.—Tyrwhitt:—Vindication; pages 193, 194.

LECTURE XIV.

CHATTERTON.

As I thought it my literary, and moral duty to give my opinion of Mr. Bryant, without reserve, I must quote two or three examples, more, to corroborate the justice of that opinion.

Some *cherisaunei* 'tys to gentle mynde :

“ the first line of the Entroductionne to  
“ the tragycal enterlude of *Ælla*.”

Chatterton, by adopting a typographical error from Kersey's Dictionary, instead of the right word, *cherisaunce*, which signifies, *comfort*, had written *cherisaunei*, with e, i, at the end. Mr. Bryant, in a string of imaginary, inconsistent,



petulant, and contemptuous remarks on this very pardonable mistake, exceeds *himself*. The customary tribute is again paid to Mr. Tyrwhitt, at the expence of Chatterton—"Mr. Tyrwhitt" (he says) "with his usual judgement, has restored the original reading, which was certainly as *he* represents it:

"Some *cherisaunce* it is to gentle mynde."

After floundering through many mistakes, which he attributes to Chatterton, and which retort upon himself, he thus attempts to humble the *great*, and to exalt the comparatively *little* man. "Of these mistakes the transcriber would never have been guilty, if he had possessed a fiftieth part of the learning, and sagacity of the editor."—It is, here particularly incumbent on me to quote a passage from Mr. Tyrwhitt's vindication of his Appendix: it will show that Mr. Bryant has a sagacity beyond that of all other criticks, in discovering faults which never existed; and that his praise, as well as his censure, is often without the least foundation.

“ *Cherisaunei*: Ent. 1.

Some cherisaunei 'tys to gentle'mynde.

“ In my edition of these poems, when I  
 “ was but a novice in genuine *archæolo-*  
 “ *gical* language, I set this down among  
 “ *the evident mistakes of the transcriber*,  
 “ and corrected it, very probably, as I  
 “ thought, into *cherisaunce it ys*. My  
 “ excuse must be, that I had not then seen  
 “ Kersey; who, from a mistake, as it  
 “ seems, of the printer, has this article;—  
 “ *cherisaunei*, (O.)—*comfort*. Mr. Bry-  
 “ ant, p. 562, allows that this word was  
 “ borrowed by Chatterton, from Kersey;  
 “ though before, p. 106-7, he has taken a  
 “ great deal of pains to point out the  
 “ several steps, by which Chatterton,  
 “ whom he there considers as an ignorant  
 “ transcriber from MSS, arrived at such a  
 “ complication of mistakes as are to be  
 “ found in this passage.”—Vindication of  
 Appendix, p. 177.

Here Mr. Tyrwhitt is sufficiently explicit, and faithful, to convince Mr. Bryant of his precipitance, or rather of his deliberate injustice; if he *could* be convinced

of it. He has not, indeed, remonstrated against his unfair, and inconsistent criticism, with that plainness, and ingenuous warmth, which it deserved: *that* disagreeable task was left for *me*; a sense, however, of my literary, and, I hope, of my moral duty, softened what was painful: and I should have despised myself, if I had eluded these obligations.

Mr. Bryant invents a curious process of Chatterton's fancied blunders on the word *cherisaunce*; blunders, which he supposes to have originated from his ignorant attempts to supply those letters of the words which had been defaced in the old manuscript from which he copied; though he afterwards openly asserts that he had borrowed the word from Kersey's Dictionary; "in which he tells us that Chatterton used "to hunt, *in a most servile manner*."—This is the haughty, and stupid language of one who neither knew how to appreciate the industry, nor the talents of our astonishing youth. At the bottom of the very page in which he allows that he had the word from Kersey, he refers to that part of Kersey which contains the word; but he omits to take any notice of the ty-

pographical error there by which *cherisaunei* is printed, for *cherisaunce*: and at the same place, that his friends might not have it in their power to plead a lapse of memory for the total inconsistency of his *preceding* with his *subsequent* opinion, he likewise refers to the former part of his own work, in which he ascribes the orthographical corruption of the word to the complicated ignorance of Chatterton, and to his illiterate endeavours to supply what was rendered illegible by time. I can conceive nothing more illiberal, and incongruous, than this aggregate of disparagement, and of crude, imaginary notions. I shall therefore more justly apply his own words to *him* than *he* applied them to *Chatterton*:—"We have, in this example, all the misconceptions of a bad critick, who was guilty of a complication of mistakes:"—and I will add, of *disingenuous inconsistencies*.—Mr. Bryant knows, or *should* know, that *cherisaunce* is to be found in Chaucer, and in our other old authours: I shall therefore close my remarks on this article, by observing, that if we carefully consider the single mistake of copying *cherisaunei* from Ker-



sey's Dictionary, instead of writing the word, *cherisaunce*, as it *should* have been written; *that* single mistake is almost a decisive proof, that the poenis which have been supposed to be Rowley's, are the real compositions of Chatterton.—See Bryant, pages 106, 562.

No, *bestoikerre*, I wylle go.—Ælla. v. 91.

To *beswicke*, is the proper old verb; it signifies to deceive. Kersey had copied it erroneously, *bestoike*, from Skinner's Etymologicon, where it was indistinctly printed. From *bestoike*, Chatterton formed the substantive, *bestoikerre*; agreeably to the analogy of our language; but with a violation of orthography, by the mistake into which he was led by Kersey. This is an honest, and obvious account of the errour; and the cause of it Mr. Bryant *must* have seen, if he had not been determined *not* to see it. He is again completely refuted; and what is worse, his unfairness is exposed, by his tender, friend, and antagonist, Mr. Tyrrwhitt.

“ *Bestoiker*. Æ. 91. *Deceiver*. Chatterton. See also, Æ. 1064.—Mr. Bryant

“ allows, p. 108. that this word has been  
 “ put, by mistake, for *Beswiker*. I won-  
 “ der that *he*, who appears to have had  
 “ Kersey at hand, did not advert to the  
 “ following article in him—‘ To *bestoike*,  
 “ ‘ (O.)—to *betray*;’—which, I am per-  
 “ suaded, misled Chatterton. But then  
 “ there would have been no room for the  
 “ inference, ‘ that this young man could  
 “ ‘ not read the characters with which he  
 “ ‘ was engaged.’ I cannot see that the  
 “ letters in Skinner are so well defined,  
 “ but that Kersey might as easily have  
 “ been led into such a mistake by *them* as  
 “ by those of a manuscript.”—Vindica-  
 tion of Appendix: pages 167, 168.

“ Chatterton” (says Mr. Bryant) “ has  
 “ idly expressed the word, *bestoikerre*. It  
 “ is plain that this young man could not  
 “ read the characters with which he was  
 “ engaged.—To decipher the characters  
 “ in old writings, requires a competent  
 “ knowledge in the language which they  
 “ transmit: but of this Chatterton was  
 “ confessedly destitute.”—Bryant, pages  
 109, 110, 111. No young person could  
 ever be more unjustly, and cruelly charg-  
 ed with idleness, whether indolence, or

negligence is meant, than Chatterton. This tribute is due to his memory, if he really was *not* Mr. Bryant's Rowley. But what shall we think of *that* idleness which rejected glaring truth, to obtrude on us, in its place, miserable sophistry, and palpable falsehood? I wish, from my heart, however idle *young* men may *be*, that the *strenua inertia* of *old* men may be more usefully, and innocently employed. If we could suppose Mr. Bryant ingenuous in his researches, he shows an ignorance greater than that of any school-boy; he is unacquainted even with the use of a Dictionary. But this is morally impossible; you know the alternative. Chatterton's formation of the word, *bestoi-kerre*, and the source from which he formed it, make another damning proof against a Bryant, and a Milles; but a gratifying, and glorious proof, to the admirers of stupendous genius, in early youth, that *he* was the authour of the poems which were published under the name of Rowley. When Cæsar passed the Rubicon, he passed it from an expanded, from a glorious ambition; he passed it for the empire of the world. But how shall we

estimate *that* childish, I was going to say, that more criminal ambition, which betrays the commonwealth of letters, for a word?

I must give one instance more of Mr. Bryant's accuracy in making critical inferences, and of his good faith. You must excuse the perseverance of my poetical zeal:—" 'Tis not a private loss;"—the world "demands your tears." I am not indulging a selfish, malignant resentment: of which I hope that I have been more frequently than justly accused; I am combating the man who despises Chatterton.

In the Memoirs of Sir William Canynge, and in some farther account of him, written by Rowley the priest, which are both in Chatterton's miscellanies, we are told that Edward the IVth proposed to Canynge, for his second wife, a relation of the Queen; a lady of the family of the Wyddevilles; that he disliked the proposal, and took orders, to avoid it. The King highly resented his refusal; and he was obliged to pay him a fine of three thousand marks, to obtain his reconciliation. Mr. Bryant is as well assured that



this account of Canynge, in old English, was written by Rowley, as the world, I suppose, is now convinced that Chatterton was its authour. Proceeding on this assurance, he asks how it was possible for Chatterton, at *his* years, and in *his* limited situation, to be acquainted with these, and many other facts (real, and supposed) which are mentioned in the poems of the imaginary Rowley? The knowledge of many facts, in publick, and in private life, was accessible to Chatterton; to a youth who had read seventy authours, before he was eleven years old; whose industry, and judgement infinitely surpassed his age. The great probability, I may say, the certainty of his very extensive knowledge, is ably, and circumstantially proved by Mr. Tyrwhitt. Of Canynge's ordination, and of the payment of the fine, there can be no doubt. They are recorded in the Register of the Bishop of Worcester; and in the epitaph which is inscribed on Canynge's monument, in the church of St. Mary Redcliffe at Bristol. And of these two facts we have no other authentick records. I shall quote from Mr. Tyrwhitt, more faithfully than

he is quoted by Mr. Bryant, this gentleman's curious evidence, by which Canynge's ordination, to avoid the disagreeable marriage is ascertained.—“ Of Sir  
 “ William Canynge's going into orders” (says Mr. Bryant) “ *to avoid the marriage*  
 “ *proposed by King Edward*, we have the  
 “ following evidence, for which we are  
 “ indebted to Mr. Tyrwhitt. It is certain,  
 “ from the Register of the Bishop of Worcester, that Mr. Canynge was ordained  
 “ Acolythe by Bishop Carpenter, on the  
 “ 19th of September, 1467, and received  
 “ the higher orders of sub-deacon, deacon,  
 “ and priest, on the 12th of March,  
 “ 1468, O. S. on the 2d and 16th of April,  
 “ 1468, respectively.—“ This evidence was  
 “ produced by me [Introd. Account; p.  
 “ 23.] to show the time of Canynge's  
 “ going into orders; which it does, I  
 “ think, very precisely: but I never  
 “ dreamt of its being applied to show that  
 “ he went into orders, *to avoid a marriage*  
 “ *proposed by King Edward*, of which the  
 “ Register says not one word. On the  
 “ contrary, I hope to demonstrate very  
 “ clearly, that the dates ascertained by the  
 “ Register are totally inconsistent with

“ those in the *Memoirs*; and of consequence, that neither the *Memoirs*, nor the *Storie of William Canynge*, which agrees with them in the same extravagant fiction, could possibly have been written by a genuine Rowley.”—Vindication of Appendix, p. 107.

Mr. Tyrwhitt *never dreamt* that his real evidence would be so strangely applied. Here the mildness of the disciple (which never scruples to overshoot its bounds, when it ought to be more particularly circumspect, and reverent) is, with good reason, stimulated above its usual submission to its great master in *archæological learning*. Many other assertions; many other misquotations are hazarded by Mr. Bryant, in the course of his work; to give a being to objects which never existed but in his own mind.

One instance more may be entertaining, in which Mr. Tyrwhitt almost emerged from his prudent, and systematical tranquillity; in which he almost rose from a Chesterfield to a Cato; when he was roused to some sensibility by one of Mr. Bryant's unexampled absurdities. Rowley's account of Canynge's ordination says

that he was ordained on Saturday, the 19th of September; the day of St. Matthew. This is inconsistent with the Register of the Bishop of Worcester. The inconsistency; the solution of the inconsistency; and Mr. Tyrwhitt's pertinent, and strong observations on that solution, I shall give in his own words.

“ For the present—let us suppose, upon  
 “ the single evidence of the Memoirs, that  
 “ King Edward was at Bristol in September 1467; that he formed the strange  
 “ scheme of making the fortune of one of  
 “ his wife's cousins by marrying her to  
 “ master Canynge; and that master Canynge had no way of avoiding the match  
 “ but by stealing into orders. The account goes on to say, that ‘ on the Fry-  
 “ ‘ day following he was prepared; and  
 “ ‘ ordained the nexte day’ (i. e. Saturday,) ‘ the day of St. Matthew; and on  
 “ ‘ Sunday sung his first mass.’—But this  
 “ is a flat contradiction of the Register;  
 “ which says that Canynge received his  
 “ first orders on the nineteenth of September, 1467; for the day of St. Matthew, as every one knows, is the twentieth of that month; and moreover, in



“ the year 1467, the day of St. Matthew  
 “ fell not on a Saturday, but on a Sunday;  
 “ another historical fact, with which the  
 “ account in the Memoirs is totally incon-  
 “ sistent. Mr. Bryant indeed has hit  
 “ upon a curious method of reconciling  
 “ these contradictions, by supposing that  
 “ the day of St. Matthew, in the Memoirs,  
 “ means the vigil; or, as he calls it, the  
 “ fast of St. Matthew; i. e. in common  
 “ acceptation, *the day before the day of*  
 “ *St. Matthew*. If he has discovered any  
 “ arguments by which he has been able  
 “ to make *this* supposition probable to  
 “ himself, I admire his ingenuity; if he  
 “ can make it probable to others, I shall  
 “ certainly never venture again to dispute  
 “ with so powerful a master of the arts of  
 “ persuasion.”—Vindication of Appendix;  
 pages 110, 111.—Now I think it undeni-  
 able that repeatedly, wilfully, and per-  
 versely, to make authours, and records  
 say what they never meant to say, is  
 downright *falsification*; and *that* is Dr.  
 Johnson’s definition of *imposture*.

If we consider Mr. Bryant, in his dis-  
 dainful strictures on Chatterton, as an  
 ungenerous critick, we need not be sur-

prized that from his treatment of that great, but unfortunate young poet, he hath incurred this literary characteristic; if we recollect his invidious, and most uncharitable animadversions on the nobly pious exordium of Mr. Pope's Universal Prayer; animadversions which are entirely without foundation; and which could not have arisen in the mind of any man but himself. If we consider him as a critick perfectly eccentric, and visionary, we must allow that it has always been his taste, and his glory, pertinaciously to espouse the improbable, and the monstrous; to deform elegant passages, and to deny important, and prominent facts, of which mankind, before *him*, had not entertained a doubt. Nothing can be too absurd for that fancy; nothing can stand in the way of that pen, which has unfeelingly demolished, and destroyed the glowing texture, and the interesting images of classical story; which has waged a war against Troy, more exterminating than that of Ajax, and Achilles; which hath *written* it out of all existence. The whole fate of that renowned city is memorable, and singular: in ancient times,

after it fell by arms, its ashes were consecrated to immortality, by a *Pontifex maximus* of Apollo; by a divine poet; and in modern times, a gallant soldier; a great favourite *utriusque Minervæ*, hath rescued them from the annihilating sacrilege of a rude, and profane antiquarian; and hath restored them to their hallowed ground. My friend Captain Francklin, in his accurate, animated, and picturesque remarks, and observations on the Plain of Troy, hath done justice to himself, while he vindicated the geographical, and historical veracity, and indeed the poetical glory of Homer; with a classical, and elegant spirit, which were worthy of an unaffected, and rapturous admirer of that venerable, and immortal bard. He hath shown that the relaxing climate, and the more relaxing luxury of India, were not able to enervate a vigorous mind; that like Ulysses, he was proof against the bowls of Circe; that they had not infused into his breast the least oblivion of *Westminster*, and of his *father*.

What a strange undertaking!—To attempt to destroy the universal, and well-established belief of three thousand years!

It is difficult to say whether the attempt was more at war with common sense, or common modesty; or with the heartfelt interest of poetical beauty. What a cold heart, and hand must *they* be, that would endeavour to obliterate from imagination the striking scenes of the father of Grecian poetry; the palace, and the city of the old, and good, but unfortunate Priam; the romantick heights of Callicolone; the fertile, and Elysian plain of Troy; the meandering course of the Simois, and the Scamander; the everlasting fig-tree; which, by the power of Homer's magick, still "lives in description, and looks green "in song;" the tomb of ancient Ilus, and of the later heroes! What an opinionative, what an *esprit de travers* must *that* be, which could suppose that the poet would repeatedly, circumstantially, and minutely, and with a folly as unparalleled as ineffectual, mention all these objects, if they had never, in reality, existed! Mr. Bryant has been very industrious to *acquit Chatterton*; but he has been equally industrious to *convict Homer*, of IMPOSTURE. I spurn the mercantile criteria of a Tyrwhitt, and a Walpole; I am not so



cruelly partial as to confine forgery to writing; any more than I am still so much more cruelly undistinguishing as to confound the guilt of forging a poem with that of forging a Bank-bill. But I must insist that to forge a city, and its territories, is as absolute an imposture as to forge a heroick poem;—perhaps it is more criminal; (if, indeed, this harsh epithet can, with propriety, be applied to inferiour, and trifling offences;)—as it may introduce a more inconvenient embarrassment, and confusion into the learned world. Hence, if Mr. Bryant's theory of the non-existence of Troy should be credited hereafter, by his frigid, and merciless brother-antiquarians, as little quarter may be given to the memory of Homer as hath been granted to that of Chatterton; especially as the cowardly animosity of the presumptuous, and unfeeling tribe is apt to be particularly hostile to departed genius; and in proportion as that genius was indigent, and great.

That the love of fame is a universal passion, is a part of Dr. Young's moral, and poetical theory. If this position is true, by what an infinite variety of ways

do we endeavour to ascend to the temple of the goddess? We prosecute our favourite aim by every trifle of pedantry, as well as by the persuit of those great, and splendid objects which captivate the dazzled imagination; or which obtain, as they deserve, the moral applause of mankind. If we wish to be distinguished we should determine to endeavour to accomplish “a noble end by noble means:” for life is short; and we are accountable to Heaven. Mr. Bryant, in his inelegant, and rustick phraseology, repeatedly observes that Chatterton was *greedy of praise*. I am satisfied that Mr. Bryant had this *avarice of air*; by his affectation of a whimsical originality; by the objects which *he* invented, and endeavoured to establish, in the field of literature; objects which were perfectly calculated to startle, and surprise, but by no means to afford rational information, and rational pleasure. I do not mean altogether to vindicate Chatterton’s mode of aspiring to poetical glory; for we should not sport with truth, either in great, or in small transactions;—it is a sacred, a divine object. I shall only, at present, observe, that *he* courted the ad-

miration of the world, by an astonishing application, and ingenuity; by an exertion, and display of astonishing genius. And this application, and exertion were employed on affecting, and sublime subjects; on subjects which warmly interest the human mind. *His* ardour for celebrity I shall, therefore, class with the ambition of heroes: but they who persue distinction by a love of musty researches, and uncouth monsters, must have a depraved, and distempered intellectual appetite: they reject a salutary, and elegant regale; they delight to feed on garbage: *then*, let *them* take to themselves Mr. Bryant's coarse, and animal epithet; it is as expressive of *their* little fever, as the idea which it conveys is abhorrent from the agitation of a great soul; they are *greedy of praise*.

I must beg leave to trespass a little farther on your patience; while I say something on the late Dr. Milles, the Dean of Exeter. This man was so weak, and disingenuous a creature; and the little learning that he had was so meagre, and pitiful, that the wonder from *him* would have been, if he had shown *any* degree of ta-

lent; any literary sincerity; any manly, and respectable knowledge. He was the companion of Mr. Bryant in the critical knight-errantry; in their painful, but vain efforts, to create a Rowley; to substantiate a shadow. Both the gudgeons were hooked by the shining bait which was thrown out for them by Chatterton. —From two or three intellectual features you will know the whole character of *this* gentleman's mind.

He boldly infers from the poems of his Rowley, that their authour was a perfect master of Homer, in the original. This is the constant manner of the man; to suppose, and assert, without the least foundation. This is a silly, ridiculous inference, for several reasons. It is totally improbable that any priest of the fifteenth century could read Homer, like a masterly Grecian, in the original. If he was at all acquainted with Homer, he must have gained any knowledge that he had of that great poet, from some Latin translation. I repeat it; none of the poems afforded him the least foundation to suppose that his visionary Rowley knew any thing of Homer, in the Greek original.



In the Battle of Hastings, indeed, there are several instances of imitations of Homer, in one of his worst properties; in his hunting of similes to death. The fault, however, is redeemed by the poetical beauties which the similes of our English poet contain. And by the use of those similes it is demonstrated to us that Chatterton, their authour, had an intimate acquaintance with Mr. Pope's admirable, and immortal translation of the Iliad; a translation which has done inexpressible honour to its authour; and which has thrown a reflected, and additional glory on the memory of Homer. I am surprized that Mr. Tyrwhitt has not laid a particular stress on this great, and instructive object of Chatterton's English literature; where he, justly, and with some spirit remonstrates against this foolish conceit of the Dean of Exeter. His friend, Mr. Bryant, too, took it into his head that this Rowley "was a person of much reading; one who was conversant both with ancient, and modern literature." *This* he would prove, "from the frequent allusions to ancient ceremonies, and customs; and from the

“ references to Greek, and Roman authors.”—Tyrwhitt: Vindic: pages 146, 147. I have attentively read all the poems; and therefore I may venture to declare that both the assertion, and the pretended proof, are the mere inventions of a bold, and fertile imagination. But whatever these two gentlemen think may serve their cause, they will assert, without any scruple, or hesitation. Some of their assertions, and subterfuges are so despicable, that I am almost ashamed to take notice of them: but the cause of moral, of literary truth, should supersede any inferior personal considerations. When they are hardly pressed, they endeavour to cover their weakness under the following miserable resources:—“ I am told by a very  
 “ learned, and respectable gentleman that  
 “ this was really the case:”—“ This word  
 “ is to be found in *one* authour:”—“ I  
 “ know where to find several manu-  
 “ scripts:” and with many such airy references are we mocked by these honest criticks. The Dean of Exeter evidently makes Mr. Shiercliff say what he never *could* have said; if we consider, and compare the collateral circumstances: and

when he cannot account for Chatterton's improper, and unauthorized use of the old word, *lisseth*, in a fair way, he immediately fabricates, or *forges* his own word, *glisseth*; a word which no man ever heard, or saw, before; and thus he *murders* the difficulty.—See Tyrwhitt's *Vindic.* pages 127—181, 182. These mean subterfuges; these paltry tricks; this critical sleight of hand, which are habitual, and common, with these gentlemen, may surely, with propriety, be denominated, *imposture*.

The Dean of Exeter assures us that the figure of master Canynge on one of the two monuments which were erected to his memory in Redcliff church, “ exactly “ verifies a portraiture of him, as it appears among Rowley's papers.” What a superficial mind must *that* have been which could have brought *this* futile circumstance to the aid of his contemptible suppositions! This figure of master Canynge was never seen by the eye of Thomas Rowley; but it had been often surveyed by the bright, and luminous eye of Thomas Chatterton; and his fancy was more bright, and luminous than his eye; and had the art of *turning* its interesting

objects *to shape*, with a wonderful facility and execution. There *was* a gross eye which could discern the stone of the statuary; but its obnubilated rays could not mount to the soul of Chatterton.

I must give you a specimen of the philological skill of this Dean of Exeter; of this man of most profound erudition.

Whose eyne dyd feerie sheene, like blue-hayred defs,  
That dreerie hange on Dover's emblaunched clefs,—

Eng. Met. v. 9.

are two lines in Chatterton's *Englysh Metamorphosis*; and *blue-hayred defs*, according to *his* interpretation, are meteors, or vapours. "But," says the Dean, "they rather mean, *spectres*, or *fairies*, "which might be supposed to inhabit "these cliffs. *Deffenetyll*, in the P. parv. "is explained, *Archangelus*. *Deffe*, "therefore, may signify, *spirit*."—This formidable critick knew less than a common school-boy how to use a dictionary. For on the authority of the little dictionary, from which he presumes to correct our illustrious poet, and to speak contemptuously of him, *deffe netyll* simply means *deaf nettle*; or the herb which is



more commonly called, *dead nettle*. Now, unfortunately for antiquarian destiny, of this plant, *archangel* is the technical, or botanical term; and it was as unfortunately mentioned by the Dean's Dictionary of Old Words; for it was the Charybdis which absorbed scholastick, and clerical dignity. Mr. Tyrwhitt exposes this despicable blunder of the Dean, in a vein of excellent critical precision, and of entertaining pleasantry.—“ Though,” says he, “ I believe *meteors*, or *vapours*, to be “ not a less fanciful interpretation of *defs* “ than *spectres*, or *fairies*, its total want “ of foundation cannot so easily be de- “ monstrated.”—Vindic: pages 202, 203. —It is not impossible that the word *def* might have the metaphorical signification that Chatterton gave it, in some dictionary of old English with which *he* was conversant. To Mr. Tyrwhitt's apposite remark I shall add, that, in general, criticks, and antiquarians have but microscopick eyes; formed only to admit a small, and immediate object: we may justly apply to *them* the lines which Mr. Pope, but *not* with equal justice, applies to heroes; es-

pecially as he particularly mentions *Alexander*:

Not one looks forward; onward still he goes;  
Yet ne'er looks forward farther than his nose.

Essay on Man.

The eyes of the wild Scythians, to which the simile is applied, might well be compared with fiery meteors, or vapours; but what similitude had they to spectres, angels, or archangels? You will certainly now agree with me, that it ill became this priest of Bœotia to throw the following contemptuous, and ignorant stricture at Chatterton. Alluding to the words, the meaning of which it was supposed that he had mistaken—"The glossaries" (says the Dean) "in which alone they existed, were not in his hands; nor was it within his ability, to understand them, if they had been before him."—Milles: p. 514. This passage reminds me of the dull, and loquacious pedant, who presumed to teach Annibal the art of war. My last, and honest tribute to the memory of the Dean of Exeter shall be, my unreserved opinion that a more proper person could not have been found in all Europe, for a president

to a society of antiquarians. I shall close this part of my observations with a passage from the eloquent, and spirited Bolingbroke, which my memory has frequently presented to me while I was contemplating my heroes of the verbal chivalry of old times.—“ I had rather take the Darius  
 “ whom Alexander conquered, for the son  
 “ of Hystaspes, and make as many ana-  
 “ chronisms as a Jewish chronologer,  
 “ than sacrifice half my life, to collect all  
 “ the learned lumber that fills the head of  
 “ an antiquary.”—On the Study of History.

I shall now take some view of the external evidence that Chatterton was the real authour of the poems which are attributed to Rowley. The delusion is, at least, greatly vanished; therefore I need not treat *this* part of my subject so circumstantially, and minutely as it has been discussed by others. To omit it, however, would be neglectful; it may not have engaged the attention of many of my audience: to inquire into important truth; to ascertain, and to establish it, must ever be agreeable employments to a reasoning, and reflecting being. And sen-

timent, and generosity will read the disputed poetry, with a double pleasure; with a purer, and more forcible enthusiasm; when they know that it was produced by a most extraordinary person; by an intellectual phænomenon. As to the *internal* evidence of the real authour of these poems, it will make an essential, and the most agreeable part of my main object. The tints, and the fragrance of the roses will expiate the perplexities, and the punctures of the thorns.

When our young poet was little more than five years old, he was dismissed from school, as a stupid, unimprovable boy. Perhaps, while the elements of knowledge were injudiciously, and rudely inculcated, the mental dawn of the puerile scholar was already working, and rising within him; and while the pedagogue was sinking to Erebus, *he* was already asserting his Olympus. When he was rusticated from Pyle-street, “his mother” (says Mr. Bryant) “took him in hand herself.”—P. 519. As this gentleman takes every opportunity to pay his equally just, and elegant compliments to *my* much admired, and much regretted youth: *I*,



surely, have a right to pay *my* plain, and unreserved compliments to *him*; though I hope that their spirit will be more just, and their language more justifiable. Cavilling pedants, insulting talents, extort a philological rigour, even from liberal minds. So “his mother took him in “hand herself;” *this* language is worthy of the Partridge, or of the Thwackum of the glorious *Fielding*.

“Mrs. Chatterton” (I quote from Dr. Gregory) “was rendered extremely unhappy by the apparently tardy understanding of her son; till *he fell in love*, “as she expressed herself, with the illuminated capitals of an old musical manuscript, in French, which enabled her, “by taking advantage of the momentary “passion, to initiate him in the alphabet. “She taught him, afterwards, to read, “from an old black-lettered Testament, “or Bible.”—Gregory; p. 4. The Doctor judiciously observes that probably these objects by which his eye, and fancy were struck, at an early period of his life; that this very mode of initiating him in the elements of learning, might be the first motives by which he was afterwards

impressed with an attachment to antiquities; an attachment which he prosecuted with so much ardour. I by no means agree with Helvetius, that all who are properly organized, are equally adapted, by Nature, to *any* acquirements of the mind; and that all future excellence is the result of a choice determined by external, and accidental circumstances: but I have no doubt that as those objects, or circumstances, attract observation, strike the fancy, and engage the affections, the powers of true genius (which are *providentially* rare, when we consider the envy, and cruelty of man) are frequently thrown into particular motions, and directions. What I have now written is rather anecdote than evidence: I proceed, therefore, to facts of more decisive proof,

If Thomas Rowley, the pageant of our criticks, had been the authour of these poems, he must have been extremely distinguished, and celebrated; if not while he lived, after his death. But not the least notice is taken of him by any old biographer, or historian; not even by William of Worcester, who was himself of Bristol, and frequently mentions Ca-

nyngge. That Canynge, who was a collector of curious, and valuable books from all quarters; which were, undoubtedly, to compose his library, should lock up the manuscripts of *one* particular authour, in a chest that was placed in the tower of a church; and that the lock should have had six keys, which were entrusted to different persons; is a story that could have had no weight but with credulous, positive, and stupid minds. The chest only contained what was often destined to such repositories, in old times;—deeds of law; money, and jewels. But if we admit, for a moment, the ridiculous notion; like other incredible fictions, it is fruitful of absurdities. For the chest was opened; and its contents were taken out, and examined, in the year 1727: but till more than forty years after, the name of Rowley was never mentioned; when, in 1768, Chatterton published, in Farly's Bristol-Journal, and in the old English, an account of the ceremonious, and magnificent opening of the old bridge. About that time, Chatterton informed some inhabitants of Bristol, that there were, in *his* possession, many manuscripts of poems which were

written by Thomas Rowley, a priest, in the fifteenth century. Those manuscripts, he said, were parts of the heap of old writings which were taken from the chest that was in the tower of Red-cliff church. And thus, according to *his* account, they must have been brought to his father's house, in the year 1748, with a great number of parchments that had been deposited in the chest. I must here observe that no poems were ever produced as Rowley's, *but* by Chatterton.

I shall quote a passage from Mr. Tyrwhitt, which ingeniously, and effectually exposes the absurdity of this mysterious, and magical chest.

“ Supposing—for the present, that such  
 “ a whim might have entered into the  
 “ head of Canynge as might have led him  
 “ to deposite a fair transcript of his  
 “ friend's poems in a church-chest rather  
 “ than in a library; is it possible to sup-  
 “ pose that this transcript was, at that  
 “ time, the only existing copy of those  
 “ poems? Had the authour destroyed all  
 “ his original draughts? Had he never  
 “ given any copies to any other person?  
 “ Besides, according to the Memoirs of



“ Canynge, by Rowley, which Mr. Bry-  
 “ ant cites so frequently, Rowley survived  
 “ Canynge several years. Was he under  
 “ any restriction *never* to compose any  
 “ more poems; nor even an elegy on his  
 “ patron’s death? Or lastly, could he be  
 “ so insensible of even laudable ambition,  
 “ as to trust the immortality of his own,  
 “ and his friend’s fame, to a *single* copy  
 “ of his works, and *that* locked up in an  
 “ almost inaccessible repository?”—Tyr-  
 whitt: Vindic: p. 119.

Chatterton was, in general, very observ-  
 ant of his literary drama; of the person-  
 age, and character, which he had given to  
 Rowley: but he sometimes dropped that  
 attention; naturally claiming his own  
 greatness; or obliquely reproaching an  
 insensible world for neglecting it. He  
 owned to Mr. Barrett that the first part of  
 the Battle of Hastings was *his own com-  
 position*. Depressed with melancholy, on  
 some particular occasion, before he left  
 Bristol, he wrote a will: even at *that*  
 juncture, we see the rays of genius dart-  
 ing through the cloud of distress. In  
 that will there is the following memorable  
 clause.—‘ I leave Mr. Clayfield the sincer-

‘ est thanks my gratitude can give ; and I  
 ‘ will, and direct, that whatever any per-  
 ‘ son may think the pleasure of reading  
 ‘ *my works* worth, they immediately pay  
 ‘ their own valuation to *him*, since it is  
 ‘ then become a lawful debt to *me* ; and to  
 ‘ him, as my executor, in that case.’——

“ If it should be asked, but why then did  
 “ he not explicitly declare himself the au-  
 “ thour of the works attributed to Row-  
 “ ley? I can only answer, that, possibly,  
 “ *in the fit of* SULLEN DESPAIR, which  
 “ had determined him to quit the world,  
 “ he might equally disdain, either to con-  
 “ fess, or to continue, his IMPOSTURE.”——

Tyrwhitt: Vindic: p. 189. By the ex-  
 pression, *my works*, nothing could pos-  
 sibly then be meant, but the works which  
 he had published, as Rowley’s. Mr. Tyr-  
 whitt supposes a very natural question;—  
 Why he did not openly acknowledge him-  
 self the real Rowley?—I cannot omit to  
 censure the barbarous, or stupid answer  
 which he gives to that question, as it de-  
 serves. The temper of mind, Mr. Tyr-  
 whitt, which determined him to quit life,  
 was *not a fit of sullen despair*, as *you*  
 have misrepresented it, with an equal

want of judgement, and of enlightened humanity. Nor was it a fit of rage, as it was as uncharitably, or ignorantly, but more savagely termed by your friend, Mr. Bryant.—It was the result of a long established, however erroneous habit of thinking: it was a consciousness of extraordinary endowments, and prerogatives of Nature, insulted by the minions of Fortune; persecuted, and oppressed, with all the horrors of adversity: it was a resolution as deliberately formed, as it was firmly executed, to retire from an unequal conflict of exquisite sentiment with an unfeeling world. Mr. Bryant's barbarous taunt, in his expression of *rage*; the coarse, and merciless insult of a hard, and rough mind, to unfortunate genius, overwhelmed with unutterable distress, refers to his tearing of his manuscripts into small fragments, immediately before the fatal catastrophe. This act was not an effect of rage; it was a deliberate, a regularly determined deed; it was a deplorable part of the execution of a tragical plan. I am far from saying, for I am far from thinking, that *his* suicide, that *any* suicide, while we retain our senses, is justifiable:

but there is a splendour, even in the errors, and absurdities; there is a splendour even in the guilt of great souls; and I *would* not have it injured; I would not have it violated; I would not have it clouded, by vulgar, and contaminating breath. To tear his manuscripts into small, illegible pieces, was consistent with his farewell views of the world, on his last melancholy day; it was *not* an abrupt, and insulated act of impotent rage; it was intimately connected with his past fortune, and with his approaching fate. In consequence of his experience of mankind; in consequence of the sentiments which naturally flowed from that experience, he did *right* (fool that I am, myself, to fame, present, and posthumous!) he did right in thus annihilating his inestimable poetical treasures;—the world was unworthy of them. His own sublunary destruction followed that of his works. The dead is arraigned, and prosecuted: by a petty jury of beings perfectly at their ease, and, therefore, uninformed, and impassive, in genuine morality, he is pronounced *guilty*, with a sentence of unqualified condemnation. But where there



is omniscience, there *must* be mercy, as unerring as it is extensive: in *that* mercy methinks I see Chatterton comprehended: he obtains a pardon from the Sovereign of the Universe. If I am mistaken, I am innocently, and humbly mistaken; but can the following ideas be very repugnant to the nature of the Deity?—"Thy conduct, "unfortunate youth, was precipitate, and "violent. To oppose a brave, and persevering breast against the worst evils, is "the sublimity of virtue: to fly from suffering, by flying from life, is, to abandon virtue; it is to encroach on *My* "moral government of the world; it is to "usurp *My* providence. Thou hast mistaken a hopeless resolution for true heroism; an act of disdain, for an act of magnanimity. But *I* am thy *heavenly* "father; and I will treat thee with a lenity which thou hast not experienced "from *thy unnatural brethren, on earth.* "I favoured thy birth with the rarest endowments: but *My* celestial blossoms "are often blighted by the profane frost "of man. Yet by *thy* immature judgment, and by thy juvenile fire, and "fancy, faults might be mistaken for vir-

“tues to which they bore *some* resem-  
 “blance. *My* knowledge pervades all  
 “things; it is perfectly acquainted with  
 “the stamina; with the essence, with all  
 “the workings of matter, and of mind.  
 “Great pressures; contending forces,  
 “*must*, sometimes produce dreadful tem-  
 “porary effects, in the physical, and mo-  
 “ral world. There never was a more  
 “excessive sensibility than thine, since  
 “the creation of man: since *that* time,  
 “there never was a more excessive human  
 “obduracy than *that* which it was *thy*  
 “sublunary fate to encounter. An irre-  
 “gular event followed, where *consummate*  
 “*virtue* was requisite to counteract *na-*  
 “*ture*; the fine object was crushed by its  
 “deformed, and heavy foe. *This* was thy  
 “misfortune only in the *moment* of thy  
 “life; but it shall be amply redeemed;  
 “for *My* power of conferring happiness  
 “is infinite; it is commensurate with  
 “space, and with eternity.”

Mr. Walpole is as undistinguishing, and  
 unfeeling, as a Bryant, and a Tyrwhitt, on  
 the melancholy subject of the suicide, and  
 its remarkable circumstances. Yet *one*  
 observation, in the defence, or apology,

to which I have already referred; an observation, which it would be unfair in me not to select, is an excellent reproof of those two criticks, and himself. “He “preserved” (says he) “a dignity in de-  
 “spair.” This is a concise, but just, and strong description, of the last act of his tragedy. What a pity it is that this remark was not characteristick of the general strain of what Mr. Walpole hath written on Chatterton! Oh! si sic omnia dixisset! si sic omnia fecisset!—“How  
 “had he blessed mankind, and rescued  
 “*me!*”—blessed the world with a luminary of genius, which is not seen for ages; and rescued *me* from the melancholy office of paying to *one* memory my tribute of grief, and admiration; and from the pain of censuring *another*, with that explicit impartiality which was demanded by justice, and by virtue. While he rescued me from pain, what pleasure would he have afforded me, in celebrating his well-applied humanity, and generosity to Chatterton! The novelty of the objects would have attracted, and animated my eulogy: the patron would have been almost as extraordinary a theme as the poet,

in the annals of our English nobility:—thanks to an undefinable, to a monstrous humanity, which *murders* while it *protects*;—thanks to a savage taste, which delights in the disfigurement, in the destruction of *a man*! The laurels of our Muses droop before the flourishing honours of a *Belcher*, and a *Burke*. How is the latter glorious, and immortal name, vilified, and disgraced!

When vulgar souls;—when your Bryants, your Tyrwhitts, and your Gregorys, presume to make laws for the rapid, and elevated motions of great minds; when they presume to tell us how they are impelled, and affected, in their achievements; in their exigences; in the progress, and in the accomplishment of their despair;—when they talk of their *sullen fits*; of their *rage*; of their *bitterness of heart* (this is one of the *abusive*, and incongruous expressions of Mr. Bryant), they remind us of what Condé said to Turenne, when they were conversing on the anecdotes, and memoirs, which had been published concerning themselves, by paltry scribblers:—“These fellows” (said Condé) “make us think, and speak, and



“ act, just as *they* would have thought,  
 “ and spoken, and acted, if *they* had been  
 “ in *our* stations, offices, and situations.”

Am not I wandering strangely, you will say, from the object which I had immediately under my consideration? What has all this to do with the external evidence that Chatterton was the authour of the antiquated poems? I think that it is connected with that evidence. All the remarkable passages of the Life of that extraordinary youth were analogous to a great scale of human existence: collated, and compared, they announced the indefatigable, the fervid, the exalted mind; they announced *the true Rowley*. When he knew no want, he habituated himself to a light, and simple diet; that his faculties might be the more free, and active, in their generous pursuits. When he was desired to make a substantial meal, he used to reply, that “ he wished not to  
 “ make himself more stupid than God  
 “ had made him.”—Is it not to be severely regretted, that this amiable, that this nobly ambitious young creature, should have pined under the pressure of want? But do not you all feel as much

indignation as myself, at *the sullen fit of despair*;—at *the rage*; at *the bitterness of heart*; with which he is charged by a Bryant, and a Tyrwhitt?—do not you all feel as much indignation, and compassion, as myself, when I inform you, that for the three days which preceded the day of his death, he had been absolutely without food? As Mr. Walpole said, “he preserved a dignity in despair;” he preferred independence before life. The last period of his existence, and all its preceding tenour, evinced the unparalleled youth, who, in situations extremely unfavourable to liberal learning, had applied intensely to study; had acquired a large fund of various knowledge; and a masterly art in various kinds of composition. His unexampled industry, I may say from his infancy, in acquiring ancient, and modern English literature; an industry which his mechanical toil on the barren heath of the law (*barren* of what *I* call *wealth*) could not abate:—the engaging, manly, and striking deportment of the boy;—the enthusiasm, the rapture with which he read his Rowley to his acquaintance, and friends; and which could only

proceed from a consciousness that *he* was *the man*;—the fixed, and absorbed attention with which he used to survey Red-cliff church, from Red-cliff meadows;—the singular, and ethereal emanations of genius which used to dart from his eye, when his soul was actuated by those divine emotions, and agitations, which are unknown, and unimaginable, to *criticks*, to *antiquarians*; to *dunces*:—*all these* essential facts, and momentous circumstances, proclaim him to have been a human prodigy; whose life, though short, was characterized with that force, and originality with which he *wrote*; and whose death, more unfortunate than criminal, was deplorably distinguished with a corresponding energy.

How ill qualified certain persons are (as I have already observed) to criticize the conduct, and character of minds which are extremely different from their own, I shall farther evince by two short quotations from Mr. Tyrwhitt. And I hope that in *all* our literary history their equals are not to be found, for an ignorance of the constitutional, and established tendency, and operations of active, and ex-

cursive minds; and for an insensibility to their high achievements, and to their deep distress.—“A spice of madness” (says Mr. Tyrwhitt) “I should suspect to be a common ingredient in a *great* literary impostor; and I think it plain, from various circumstances of Chatterton’s personal history, that *he* had a proper share of that constitutional qualification.” . . . . “We are told by his sister—that she had heard him frequently say, that he found he studied best toward the full of the moon; and would often sit up all night, and write by moon-light—The circumstance of his sleeping very little is confirmed by the evidence collected by the authour of *Love and Madness*. Whether this wakefulness should be considered as the cause, or the effect of a distempered mind, I leave to be determined by *the faculty*; it certainly added much to the time of his active life.”—Tyrwhitt: *Vindic*: pages 141—153. How constitutional madness is at all connected with literary imposture, I shall leave common sense to determine. If there is a natural connexion between them, I can easily prove that



some of the men, to whom Mr. Tyrwhitt habitually, and profoundly bowed, were far fitter for Bedlam than Chatterton *was*; for *their* impostures (I am sick of the hackneyed *abuse* of the word; therefore I hate to use it even where it is DESERVED) *their* impostures ended in demonstrating that *they* were a set of prevaricating, whiffling, trifling creatures: therefore madness might well be attributed to *them*: they *strutted, and fretted their hour upon the stage*; for no rational, and interesting end; not to acquire a dignified renown, but to obtain ignominy. But Chatterton's was, *comparatively*, a regular, a systematical insanity, if you will pardon the apparent inconsistency of the expression: *his* fine fictions reflected a flood of glory on *him* who formed them; *his* madness, in letters, was congenial with the madness, in arms, which, with as gross an absurdity, was attributed to Alexander of Macedon; and not with a little folly, and stupidity, to Charles of Sweden.

“The conscious moon” (says one of the greatest of poets) “through every  
“distant age,”—“hath held a lamp to  
“wisdom.” But here Mr. Tyrwhitt ap-

prehends that she held a lamp to *insanity*. Perhaps *I* may be brought into the predicament of madness by these profound judges of human nature, for making a very obvious, and common observation; —that the stillness of night, and its sacred luminary's effect on the imagination, of a soft, but impressive religion, and awe, make it a season extremely propitious, in many studious, and active minds, to aspiring contemplation; to noble thought. Our illustrious youth; for making the most of time; for emancipating himself into nocturnal freedom, from the vile vassalage of the day; was entitled to virtuous respect, and praise; not to stupid, and profane contempt, and derision. For God's sake, Mr. Tyrwhitt, if *you*, and your colleagues, *must*, from your nature, be invariably discreet, and safe; if you *must*, for ever, be prudently, and uniformly complaisant; *do* not class with madness that honourable eccentricity which mounts above *your* sordid sphere; and acknowledges no centre of its attraction, and revolution, but that of independence, and glory. Let genius have its vigils, of a regular, but ardent application,

and ambition;—unaspered;—unviolated: and let *you*, and your *friends*, “sleep on, “and take your rest;” unmolested; uncensured; if you will respect; if you will *spare*, your superiours. The tenour of *your* lives, comparatively with the activity of distinguished talents, is *a perpetual sleep*; it is, indeed, a sleep, which, from the crudities of undigested words, is often disturbed with a strange perturbation, and confusion; it is often bewildered with incoherent, and fantastick dreams.

“Whether this wakefulness” (says Mr. Tyrwhitt) “should be considered as the “cause, or the effect of a distempered “mind, I leave to be determined by *the “faculty.*”—None are more apt to perplex, and obscure, clear, and self-evident cases, in their respective departments, than *critical*, and *medical* men. Common sense will easily solve the wakefulness of an active, and aspiring mind, into the natural effect of its activity, and strenuous ambition; without having a stupid, and barbarous recourse to *insanity*. The poetical vigils of Chatterton have been the bright vigils of *many* poets: indeed, to *be* a poet, is to be a madman,

in the estimation of blockheads. I have no doubt, Mr. Tyrwhitt, that there *have* been consultations of *fools*, on the subject of Chatterton's lucubrations; therefore, do not tempt *the faculty* to expose themselves, for no good purpose: a consultation of *physicians*, in *this* case, would be a work of *medical supererogation*.

That neither the capacity of the supposed authour, nor the time which he had at his own disposal, made it practicable for him to have composed these poems, will be found, when we consider the stupendous abilities, and the intense, and persevering industry of Chatterton, a pretext as weak, and futile, as all the other sophistry which has been urged in favour of the authenticity of Rowley. As to the time that was requisite for the performance, it is proved, by a calculation of Mr. Tyrwhitt, that if he had written only twelve lines in a day, the poems of Rowley would have been completed within the year. As far as mere intellectual diligence, and labour go, *his* example has been *surmounted*: in the application of that diligence, and labour;—in working them into the fair, and lofty fabricks of



fancy, it, probably, has never been *equalled*. Dr. Wotton, at the age of six years, acquired a considerable knowledge, in the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew tongues: and we learn from Dr. Johnson's life of John Phillip Barreter, that he was a great adept in five languages, when he was but nine years old. When I come to that part of my plan in which I intend particularly to exemplify the genius of Chatterton, I shall give a surprizing specimen of his early poetical powers; *surprizing*; for it was written in his twelfth year. *This* prominent circumstance, joined but to a few others of those which I have already introduced, are sufficient to decide the question, with *any* judge who is flexible by reason. It is decided by many words which are in Rowley's poems, and which are no-where else to be found; it is decided by Chatterton's adopting of the erroneous orthography of some words, as they were printed in Kersey's Dictionary; it is expressly decided by his bequest of the contingent value of his works to Mr. Clayfield; and by his owning to Mr. Barrett that *he himself* was the authour of the first part of the Battle of Hastings. Of

what weight against *these* proofs are the vague, and superficial conversations of Dr. Milles, and Mr. Bryant, with the sages of Bristol, who seem to have had as desultory, and childish minds as themselves? Was a Barrett, a Catcott, a Capel, a Carey, and a Ruddall; men of common, and unenlarged understandings (I will allow them the sagacity of the good women, to enforce their authority)—were *they* proper, and competent judges of the domestic habits, and of the retired exertions of a *Chatterton*? Had *they* sense, and liberality, justly, and generously to account for those peculiarities of manner, which are always the concomitants of original, and great genius;—for that majesty of thought which disdains impertinences, and trifles;—for that unconquerable silence, which is absorbed in beautiful, or grand ideas;—were *they* capable to penetrate, and comprehend the juvenile strength of *his* mind? could *they* reasonably presume to estimate what *he* could effect, by his avarice of time, and by his vigorous, and immortal efforts, in its short duration?

There is *one* argument equally preju-

diced, frivolous, and pedantick, with which Mr. Bryant often attempts to enforce his chimerical theory ;—that it is impossible for an authour to write well; or, in other words, to distinguish himself by his talents, without an intimate acquaintance with the learned languages. I admire, I revere the immortal writers of Greece, and Rome; I am grateful to their memories: they have recreated; they have animated; they have delighted my solitary hours; to *me*, they have peopled a dreary, cold, northern desert, with an assemblage of elegant; of majestic; of god-like existence; the genial warmth of the *dead* has atoned for the sepulchral chillness of the *living*. The generous virtues; the easily accessible, the kind society of the *heathen*, have expiated to *me*, as far as *my* private happiness was concerned (and *that*, to *me*, was every thing) the barbarities of the *christian* world. I am ready to own that their eloquence, their philosophy, and their poetry, received additional charms, and persuasives, from the beautiful, and vigorous organs, in which they are conveyed. I am ready to own that

“truths divine come mended, from their  
 “*tongues.*”—Yet let us not, like “the  
 “world’s victor,” be “subdued by sound;”  
 —let us not confound the surface with  
 the essence of things: let us not ascribe  
 the birth; the maturity; the ethereal  
 lustre; the pompous procession of great  
 ideas, and images, to the superstitious  
 talisman; to the cabalistic force of  
*words.* Let us not profanely suppose  
 that original, inventive, and fervid ge-  
 nius, the immediate, and powerfully  
 operative gift of God, cannot work all  
 its destined, and glorious way, unless it  
 is tricked out with the comparatively  
 little meretricious ornaments; with the  
 comparatively impotent contrivances, and  
 arts of man. The various, and excel-  
 lent opportunities of mental improve-  
 ment, on our celebrated publick foun-  
 dations, shall ever be respected by *me*;  
 they cultivate and strengthen a modest  
 mediocrity of talents; the greatest abili-  
 ties, as by *such* abilities they are used,  
 they enrich, embellish, and recommend:  
 but neither schools, languages, nor uni-  
 versities, can work a *torpid sterility*, into  
 a *luxuriant fertility of nature.* They can-



not exercise a moderate intellect into that large capacity which comprizes all the force, and extent of reason; all the pathos, and delicacy of sentiment; all the forms, and colours of imagination; and which is ever taking new light, and new fire, while it admits, and persues them. There is *no* substitute for *genius*; it is a rare, and incommunicable species; eminently raised above the common sphere of the human kind. And when its *ardens virtus*, or its *æquus Jupiter*, hath shown it the way that leadeth to Olympus; and it once hath set off in its glorious course; all its essential requisites; all its exuberant supplies, are within its own attainment; or at its own command. Two or three plain, and simple questions will confirm this doctrine. How many grave, and elaborate pedants have our schools, and universities produced? But, in comparison, how few luminous, and highly distinguished writers? Was Shakespeare acquainted with Latin, and Greek?—those miraculous intellectual specificks, which animate the *dead*? Yet what is Plautus, or Terence; what is Sophocles, or Euripides, to *him*?—What

O'Keeffe is to Congreve; what Southey is to Pope. Would you see the disagreeable effects of exquisite learning, when it is devoured by an inordinate appetite, and perverted into stubborn phlegm, and gross humours, by a weak digestion?—Look into Mr. Bryant, and into the Dean of Exeter. Would you contrast the disgusting sight, with viewing the vigorous, and *con amore* form; the animated flush; the celestial glow of health, and beauty?

Os, humerosque deo similis; namque ipsa decoram  
Cæsariem gnato genitrix, lumenque juventæ  
Purpureum, et lætos oculis afflarat honores:

Virg. Æneid. Lib. 2d.

would you view *these* captivating objects, produced by elegant, and interesting knowledge, easily prepared, and excellently digested? I recommend to your earnest attention the pedant's *idle youth*; *the illiterate, and ignorant transcriber*; *the poor charity-boy of Bristol*\*.

\* No person ever more highly valued all the opportunities, and means of improving the mind than Cicero; and he prosecuted them with ardour, and industry. But he gave them only that secondary consequence, above which they will never be esteemed by men of genius: he would not allow them that pri-

Mr. Bryant allows that “ he was conversant in Milton, Shakespeare, and Thomson: beyond *these*” (adds this diver in Greek, and Latin) “ he does not seem to have aspired.”—P. 563. In the name of the highest poetry;—in the name of the higher, of the Divine Being who gave it, how was it possible for him to aspire beyond a communication with *these* demi-gods; unless he had presumed to think of touching the throne of Heaven itself?—Thomson, in complete, and vivid descriptions of nature; and in a tender, and sublime morality, which he deduces from those descriptions, leaves the immortal authour of the Eclogues, and Georgicks;—Shakespeare, in the action,

mary importance to which they are preposterously raised by weak, and conceited pedants. Hence he makes the following observations, with a liberality of soul, and with a true knowledge of human nature. “ Ego multos homines excellenti animo ac virtute fuisse, et sine doctrinâ, naturæ ipsius habitu, prope divino, per seipsos: et moderatos, et graves extitisse fateor. Etiam illud adjungo, sæpius ad *laudem, atque virtutem, naturam sine doctrinâ, quam sine naturâ valuisse doctrinam*. Atque idem ego contendo, cum ad naturam eximiam, atque illustrem, accesserit ratio quædam, conformatioque doctrinæ, tum illud nescio quid præclarum, ac singulare solere existere.”—Pro Archiâ Poetâ.

and life of the drama; in a masterly knowledge of human nature; in the most instructive, luminous, and forcible poetry, leaves all ancient, and modern dramatick writers;—and Milton, in the choice of his subject; in the grandeur, in the infinity of his objects; in a mind corresponding with them; and in the thunder, and lightning of poetry;—leaves every epick muse; the Egeria of Homer himself not excepted, *far behind him*. But by the ideas of excellence with which Mr. Bryant here shows that *he* was possessed, you see the doting infatuation of men of mere erudition; of criticks, and antiquarians; they have no taste for the *pith*, they are perpetually nibbling at the *shell* of learning. *Their* little interest is engaged in the progression of grammar; in the prosody of language; they imbibe not the easy, yet ardent flow; they mount not with the intrepid, and enthusiastick flights of the poet. They clamber heavily on the *Gradus ad Parnassum*; they soar not lightly to the holy mountain. In most kinds of composition we equal the ancients; in works of imagination, but especially in poetry, we far excell them.



Our language, merely *as* a language, is, I acknowledge, inferiour to the Greek, and Roman tongues; but under the government of our literary monarchs, it has been made to speak more wonderful things, and consequently, with a more victorious emphasis, than *they*. Such is the forming, such is the creating power of transcendent genius. I shall add, that if we duly consider all the advantages, all the excellences of the English tongue; it is, at least, not surpassed by any modern language. Therefore, effectually to repel, if it is possible, the pretensions of these presumptuous criticks; to explode *their* authority, and that of their musty records, I will venture to assert, that, on the strong, and broad foundation of English literature, alone; and with that ambitious industry which is generally the companion of true genius; it may acquire all the useful information; all the elegant, and sublime knowledge, which are requisite to embody, and adorn the productions of the man who aspires after immortal glory. When I consider the vast, and indefatigable application of Chatterton, which was only less astonishing than his

genius; when I consider the beautiful, and august intellectual fabrick which was raised on *that* application; and when I consider the spirit of Shakespeare, Milton, and Thomson, blended with his own; I trust that you will not think me too proud, or too romantick, if I declare that I would rather possess the knowledge that Chatterton possessed, and *the soul with which HE was animated*, than all the learning of all antiquarians, as it affected *their* minds; or as it has been transmitted in *their* labours;—from *Grævius*, and *Gronovius*, down to *Bryant*, and to *Brand*.

Such men as those whom I have in my eye, with all their contempt of superiour minds, do not absolutely *understand* those English poets whom they have read, and whom they pretend to admire. Mr. Bryant, intending to show that it was impossible for Chatterton to write with such excellence as to merit fame, quotes one of the very fine stanzas of Mr. Gray's beautiful, and celebrated Elegy;—

Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
 The dark, unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;  
 Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Genius may lie dormant, for life, in the breast of the peasant; he may never be roused to such a sense of it as may produce its action: no favourable external circumstances may draw it forth: it may not have leisure to feel that consciousness of its powers which impells attempt: it may for ever be buried under its *destiny obscure*; under that labour which begins, and ends with the day; under the corroding anxieties; under the chilling penury of domestick life. To *these* “ gems of “ purest ray serene;” to these “ unseen “ flowers,” the beautifully apposite stanza was applied:—*not* to those geniuses who have been principally self-taught; of whom there have been many examples; who, by some propitious incentive, from *without*; or by some powerful *internal* call, have redeemed the misfortunes of their education by judicious, and persevering study; have emerged from the shade of obscurity; and have asserted their splendid day. It was ignorance, and rudeness, to apply the verses to a Chatterton; to a poetical Alcides; who had almost in his cradle strangled the deadly foes to the improvement, and exploits of

the mind,—*poverty*, and *obscurity*;—and who, in very early youth, with a rapidity greater than that of Alexander, and with a *better* glory, had conquered large provinces of knowledge; and a world of imagination.

I shall quote two passages from Mr. Bryant's book, and take some notice of them, as concisely as I can. Considered in themselves, they are beneath censure; but in superficial times, authours often obtain weight, and authority, from no intrinsick title; it is, therefore, not only fair, but laudable, to endeavour to remove prejudice, and to do justice to extraordinary desert.—“How came Chatterton by such obsolete and common words? It may be said, from these very dictionaries:” [from dictionaries of the Saxon language:—from Skinner, and from Kersey:] “but can it be imagined that by poaching, and purloining, in this abject manner, he composed these excellent poems? We may as well suppose that a pedlar built York-cathedral, by stealing a tile, or a stone, in every parish that he passed through.” —Bryant: pages 422, 423. If we read



this passage with attention, it will be difficult to say whether it is more disgraceful to the authour, for its unfounded, and stupid contempt; for its miserable attempt at reasoning; or for its still more unfortunate floundering in the bathos of comparison. Mr. Bryant, in all his disquisitions concerning the authenticity of these poems, refuses Chatterton any mental powers, or leaves them quite out of the question. He is continually robbing the stupendous boy of his native strength, and activity; and giving them all to his literary servants; to his literary instruments. The organs of speech are minutely watched; but the *mind* is totally overlooked, or despised;—the mind that worked, that formed, that composed them into a consistent, mellifluous, and illumined strain. This incongruity is not very surprizing in men who are almost destitute of mind, themselves; and whose lives have been devoted to a kind of delirious industry, in digging up, and dispersing the fragments, and ruins of learning; instead of contemplating, and worthily describing the beautiful, and august fabricks of the great literary, and poetical

architects. Every reader allows, and admires the powers of Achilles; and when we speak of the "Pelian javelin," that was "in his better hand," we rest not for a moment on the martial weapon; we accompany the vigour, the brandishing, and the missive lightning of its hero. To answer you, Mr. Bryant, in your own humility of simile, I will descend to objects with which I am not very deeply enamoured. Skinner, and Speght, and Kersey, were the grooms, and the whippers in, of *my* mighty hunter; of my poetical Nimrod; but he *controuled* the motions of these vassals: *he* was the master of Ambition's noble chace; *he* gave the grand, and rapid impulse, in the interminable field of glory. *You*, Sir, and your fraternity, are, in your abject manner, the poachers, and the purloiners: *you* traverse, and hunt, and make dreadful ravages, and destruction, in the blooming regions of Parnassus, without the least legitimate qualification. The laws of poetry give you no title to commit such depredations: if the world knew you properly; and if you properly knew yourselves, you would be classed with the

lowest of our commoners, in the republic of letters; and yet you have the confidence to dispute the privileges of our first peers. As to your simile of Yorkminster, and the pedlar, it is altogether so inapplicable, so disjointed, and so monstrous a thing, that I despair of following it, with any prospect of success; and therefore I abandon the regular pursuit. I shall only observe, that Chatterton was a *Wren*, or a *Palladio*; and that *you*, and such as *you*, are the little itinerant *pedlars*, whose idle, and childish curiosity prompts you to visit the temple which *his* genius erected: you can only view it with microscopick eyes: your puerile fancies are struck with some ingenious fret-work of a pillar; with some rich colours of a window; all the rest is a height that makes you giddy; an expansion in which you are lost. Your little perceptions admit, and are amused with detached particles of the large edifice; but you have not souls to comprehend, and admire, the masterly design; the variegated conformity; the reflecting, and reflected graces; the grandeur, and the beauty of the whole.

Mr. Bryant, after a long train of inferences, which are not supported by *one* substantial predicate; after many evidences, and proofs, which are only founded on his own assertions, at his 578th page, favours us with the following curious problem, or discovery.—“ That  
 “ the world arose from chaos, I can easily  
 “ imagine, because it was by means of a  
 “ divine hand. But that a jargon of  
 “ words should produce an Iliad, I cannot  
 “ conceive: it is therefore plain that *he*  
 “ was *not* the authour.”—Whence, I pray, is this evidence deduced? Only from your own premises; and who will give *them* any weight? What man in his senses, who is acquainted with Chatterton’s early penetration, and study; and with the writings which were published under *his* name, will ever suppose that *he* could make nothing better of our old English than *a jargon of words*? It certainly would be difficult to find, in the literary world, more egregious examples than those which I have given in my two last quotations, of the insolence of mechanical, and servile memory, to free, and excursive genius. Such criticism (if we



can give the name to effusions of conceit, and obstinacy) deserve the utmost severity of censure. *That* censure has a beneficial tendency; it tends to repress a groundless, and supercilious confidence; to vindicate injured merit; and to strengthen, and enlarge the empire of elegant, and important truth. Guard, then, for ever, with your just, and benevolent esteem, any liberal, and independent adventurer, who devotes his interest, and his life, to the prosperity of that empire, from the false, and malignant stigma, of *literary despotism, and ABUSE.*

I have no doubt that if Chatterton had lived, and if he had been treated by society as he deserved, he would have discovered the almost innocent imposition which he put upon the world. He certainly had many generous, and noble qualities; but a tenacious, and invincible veracity was not amongst his early virtues. Mr. Bryant is as positive, and absurd on his moral, as he is on his poetical character. He is either too contemptuous, or too respectful to our authour. In the latter treatment, indeed, he seldom errs. On the object, however, which is

now before me, his encomium is unfounded, and extravagant. He confounds a uniformity of fiction; a practical as well as a poetical perseverance, with unshaken integrity. Though that perseverance, in a few instances, gave way to an ingenuous ambition; to the natural, and importunate demands of truth. The *young Chatterton*, with all his disadvantages of education; with his poor opportunities of inquiry, and information, knew mankind; knew with what ease they might be duped: he knew their caprices, and extravagances, better than the *old Bryant*. These verbal criticks seem to know nothing of the great, or small springs that move human nature. One would think that their meditations, and dreams, not under the *philosophick* shade, but under the *grammatical* tree of Aristotle;—one would think that their anxious nicety to correct passages, and adjust words, kept them in a total ignorance of what is taught in the school of man. “He would “not” (says Mr. Bryant) “avail himself “of praise, to which, he knew, he had no “claim. Had he acted the contrary part, “though he might have been, at last, de-

“ tected, yet the immediate advantages  
 “ must have been great. But necessitous  
 “ as he was, and humbled, he would not  
 “ accept of bread upon those terms: his  
 “ spirit was above it.”—Bryant: pages  
 493-4. Nothing can show inexperience,  
 or inattention, more than *this* mode of  
 reasoning. If Chatterton, in composing,  
 and fabricating his old poems, had *inte-*  
*rest* principally in view; even this poor  
 charity-boy of Bristol, with an under-  
 standing far surpassing his years, must  
 have known that he would have an infi-  
 nitely better chance to be largely reward-  
 ed for the communication of them, by  
 making the world believe that they really  
 were the productions of Rowley, than by  
 acknowledging that they were his own.  
 Indeed, if he had been a favourite of For-  
 tune, great respect would have been payed  
 to his own compositions. But in viewing  
 this part of my subject, we must not only  
 consider the obscurity of *his* situation,  
 but likewise *the form and pressure* of the  
 times. We live in an age, when imita-  
 tion, fashion, power, give popularity to  
 the most despicable trifles; when a base  
 literary complaisance to vanity, and pro-

fligacy, is far more than an ample substitute for manly, disinterested genius; and when a rational, though ambitious pursuit of great intellectual objects is dwindled to a doting affection for quibbles of criticism, and baubles of antiquity. In *such* an age, the poetry of a priest of the fifteenth century, if it was even considerably inferiour to that of the fictitious Rowley, would bring far more emolument to its fortunate possessour, than a new Shakespear would gain; if such a bold, but poor adventurer; if such a self-distinguished prodigy should again arise; and if he should give us tragedies equal to those of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Othello.

I shall now give a more immediate, and particular attention to the various evidences that all the poems which were published under the name of Rowley, were, undoubtedly, the compositions of Chatterton. Some of those evidences I have already had occasion to mention: I shall here introduce them with more accuracy.

There are several words in these poems which are not to be found in any old English writer; and which we may there-



fore conclude that Chatterton himself had formed. For though criticks, and antiquarians may mangle knots which they cannot solve as much as they please, I trust that the arbitrary, and ridiculous notion that those elegant poems were written in provincial dialects, has been sufficiently refuted. Words which were used by our best old English authours, have a different signification in Rowley from the meaning which, in those authours, they convey. Legitimate, and well-approved old words are erroneously written; they have palpable orthographical faults. Some *new old* words (if I may be allowed the expression) have been formed from other old words which are warranted by good authority; yet they have been formed agreeably to the analogy of grammar, and custom. Into some of these errors he has been led by his attention to Kersey; but I doubt not that many of them were voluntary errors; ingenious, and seducing peculiarities. It was certainly, at first, the intention of Chatterton to puzzle, as well as to entertain the publick; to stimulate the love of conjecture, as well as to inspire the warmth of admi-

ration. In both these views, misfortune was successful; he had a proper contempt for vulgar criticks, and antiquarians; he knew their extravagant, yet insignificant pretensions, and their imperious demands; and I should have given him a more cordial absolution than that of a priest, for meditating his future sport with *them*;—if he had not obliged *me* to read them.

Before we come to the irresistible, and victorious evidences, there are other proofs of an inferiour, or secondary nature, which are worthy of our notice; because with every reasonable mind, *they* will have the force of decisive proofs. In this collection of poems, which has occasioned a strenuous war of words, we have two tragedies, *Ælla*, and *Goddwyn*, which are written on heroick subjects of our English history. They both abound with high poetical merit; *Ælla* is particularly marked with that character. Now an instance cannot be produced, so early as the fifteenth century, of a drama constructed on a merely domestick, civil, or military basis. Mysteries, or sacred subjects alone, employed, in those days, the rude, and Gothick dramatick muse; and

her coarse, and superstitious productions were acted in monasteries, or in churches. In the tragedy of *Ælla*, we have two passages which are written in blank verse; a species of English versification, which was totally unknown to the age in which Rowley was supposed to live. Blank verse was invented in Italy, in the beginning of the sixteenth century; and it was first introduced into English poetry by the Earl of Surrey. The various forms of composition; the profusion of picturesque, and striking similes; the beautiful, and magnificent groupes of personification, enforced with corresponding charms, and pomp of diction, which characterize *these* poems, could never have been the poetical achievements of *that* barbarous age. And a crowd of the most cogent facts, and circumstances demonstrate that they were the productions of Thomas Chatterton. It is almost demonstrated even by his closing of stanzas with the Alexandrine line; which was not used in English verse till a century after the time of the supposed Rowley. Whoever wishes to see a complete collection of what may be termed the minute,

collateral, or secondary proofs, judiciously arranged, and decisively supported, may find it in that book of Mr. Tyrwhitt, to which I have often referred, and to which I have been much obliged.



LECTURE XV.

## CHATTERTON.

I am now entering, with pleasure, more directly on the field of fame. Though I must yet beg leave to make some previous observations. Mr. Bryant gives us long quotations from some of our old poetical barbarians, who are, however, *his* particular favourites, to show their equality to the spirit, and taste of Rowley. I shall more explicitly refer to those quotations, in a proper place: they will supersede all argument against Mr. Bryant, on the subject: they will convince you of an absurdity of comparison, which, if they should not be produced, you would not believe to be possible. In *another* way, he gives a mortal stab to his

own cause: he opposes one passage to another of Spenser; and he gives us an extract from Spenser, which he contrasts with an extract from a poem of Sir John Cheeke, which he wrote on the death of Edward the Sixth. The former quotation from Spenser is rough, and altogether unharmonious; the latter is poetically flowing, and musical. The extract from Spenser, with which that from Cheeke is contrasted, is rugged, and harsh; the specimen from Cheeke is observant of the measure, and the ear. He must have fancied, however, that he was very closely urged in maintaining his hypothesis; for he reduces himself to the necessity of quoting a line and a half, or a single line, from his illustrious bards, to show that they were as great masters in the complete art of poetry, as his friend Rowley. There, he needed not to have been so parsimonious; so profuse, and injudicious he is, at other times, in bringing quotations to support that critical sophistry, which those very quotations refute. From *these* examples he positively infers, that by the flow, and polish of the numbers, we cannot even probably conjecture the

age in which the poet wrote them. But from these examples may we not conjecture; may we not safely affirm; may we not, without any pedantick arrogance, insist on the reverse? Do they not plainly show that a regular, and uniform elegance, and harmony of poetical *composition*, was far from being established; was far from being acquired;—was far from being known in England, even in the *sixteenth* century? Is it possible more effectually to evince the futility of his theory, and of the object for which it contends, than to observe, that, of his two contrasted quotations from Spenser, and from the *same* poem (a poem of inconsiderable length) the former passage is extremely rude, and dissonant; and the latter very smooth, and flowing; and that in all the poems of his Rowley, there is not a line so unmeasured, and rough, as those harsh verses are which he quotes from Spenser? I shall close what I cannot but at present think a climax of evident, and incontrovertible confutation, by farther observing, that almost every one of the three thousand lines of which Rowley consists, are modulated with a

harmony that would have been approved by *Pope*. These lines exhibit various poetical treasures;—simple, and interesting pastorals;—beautiful, and pathetick elegies:—eloquent tragedies, with diversified, and prominent characters;—and the vigour, and sublimity of the epick muse. I can never recollect all this assemblage of almost incredible juvenile excellence, without indignation for the treatment, and grief for the catastrophe of its authour. Of absurdity can there be a greater combination; of absurdity can there be a greater monster; than to suppose that elegant, and emphatical forms of composition were produced; and that this harmony was attuned, by our monks, and priests, and Goths of the fifteenth century? When I mentioned the harmony that would have been approved by *Pope*, I might have mentioned the harmony that would have been approved by *Milton*; the harmony of our divine later poet, who has been undervalued by pedantry, and who has been treated with contempt by some ignorant coxcombs of the present age, was more applicable to my present ruling object; because Chat-



terton wrote principally in rhyme. But as *Milton* is the greatest master of the elevation; of the grandeur; of the creative powers of poetry; so is he, of its graces. It was not mere rhyme which constituted the harmonious versification of Pope; his *tuneful soul lived*; it *flowed* along the line. The want of rhyme; that little, but significant ornament, when it is applied by a great master, could not be unfavourable to the harmony of *Milton*; perhaps it was advantageous to it; perhaps, from *that* want, his harmony had a gravity; a dignity; a free, and overpowering force; worthy, and characteristick of the objects which it displayed. He was, in the long maturity of genius, what Chatterton was, while he anticipated *his* meridian;—a comet of rare appearance, and of the first magnitude, in the poetical sky. His manner of writing, I mean, in his poetry, whatever illiberal prejudice, or short-sighted criticism may have said, must have been pronounced easy, and elegant language, by the best judges, of our Augustan age. He was as much a master of the tender, and beautiful, as he was, of the striking, and sublime. He

shook off the cumbrous apparel of his age; and he seized, not merely in prophetick vision, but in substance, the more graceful dress of a future æra. In style, as in imagination, “ he passed the “ bounds of place, and-time.”

I shall take the liberty to recommend the poems which were written in old English by Chatterton, and which were published by him, as Rowley’s, to the attention, to the perusal of this audience. Their trouble of applying to a glossary, for the meaning of the antiquated words, will be exuberantly repayed by rich veins of poetry. This use, however, of our ancient idiom, and language, will prevent me from giving as large examples of the genius of the poet, as I should wish, in my present vindication of his merit, to display. For it is my desire rationally to entertain, not pedantically to fatigue you. But as to treat any object of dignity superficially, is, indeed, a disrespect to those to whom we mean to give information, or pleasure, by communicating our views of those objects, I have been carefully on my guard against that negligence. And as I thought it incumbent

on me to confute groundless, and perverse criticism; and to repell ungenerous, and insolent contempt, with particular investigation, and remonstrance; I shall, for once, be fortunate in my literary endeavours, if my introduction, and discussion of minuter objects, hath not been tedious, or altogether uninteresting. Therefore in the examples which I shall now produce, I hope that the lustre of unequalled young genius will not be obscured by the veil of antiquity. If you will but be pleased to observe the harmony of the verse (if I could do it justice in reciting it) *that* alone will convince you of the extravagant absurdity of giving it to the fifteenth century. I shall first quote the following introductory lines to the second canto of the Battle of Hastings; because I flatter myself that I have the objects of their prayer, *as* much in practice, as I have them at heart.

Oh! Truth! immortal daughter of the skies;  
 Too lyttle known to wryters of *these* daies;  
 Teach me, fayre saincte! thy passynge worth to pryze;  
 To blame a friend, and give a foeman praise.

There is a new, and fine poetical image

in *Ælla*;—where *Birtha* says to that hero;

Thy name alleyne wylle putte the Danes to flyghte;  
The ayre thatt beares ytt woulde presse downe the foe.

*Ælla*. v. 340.

Here is a passage in *Ælla*, boldly characterized with the imagery, and eloquence of the tragick, and epick muse:

Soldyers.

Onn, *Ælla*, onn; we longe for bloddie fraie;  
Wee longe to here the raven synge in vayne;  
Onn, *Ælla*, onn; we certys gayne the daie,  
Whanne thou doste leade us to the leathal playne.

*Celmonde*.

Thie speche, O *Louerde*, fyreth the whole trayne;  
Theie pancte for war, as honted wolves for breathe;  
Go, and sytte crowned on corsos of the slayne;  
Go, and ywielde the massie swerde of deathe.

*Ælla*. v. 663.

The exploits of *Ælla* are nobly painted, in a martial, and energetick description:

Nor dydde hys souldyerres see hys actes yn vayne  
Heere a stoute Dane uponne hys compheere felle;  
Heere lorde, and hyndleette sonke uponne the playne;  
Heere sonne, and fadre trembled ynto helle.



Chief Magnus sought hys waie; and, shame to telle!  
 Hee soughte hys wai for flyghte; botte Ælla's speere  
 Uponne the flyyng Dacyannes schoulder felle;  
 Quyte throwe hys boddie, and hys harte ytte tare;  
 He groned, and sonke uponne the gorie greene;  
 And wythe hys corse encreased the pyles of Dacyannes  
 sleene.

Ælla. v. 774.

Of his talents for pastoral poetry I can give a very happy specimen, by extracting some passages from the Minstrel's first song in Ælla. I do some injustice to the song, by not quoting it all.

*“Mynstrelle's Song, bie a Manne, and Womanne.”*

Manne.

Tourne thee to thie shepsterr swayne;  
 Bryghte sonne has ne droncke the dewe,  
 From the floures of yellowe hue;  
 Tourne thee Alyce, backe agayne.

Womanne.

No, bestoikerre, I wylle go,  
 Softlie tryppynge o'ere the mees;  
 Lyche the sylver-footed doe,  
 Seekeynge shelter yn grene trees.

Manne.

See the moss-growne daisey'd banke,  
 Pereynge ynne the streme belowe;  
 Here we'll sytte, in dewie danke;  
 Tourne thee, Alyce, do notte goe.

Womanne.

I've hearde erst mie grandame saie,  
 Yonge damoysselles schulde ne bee,  
 Inne the swotie moonthe of Maie,  
 Wythe yonge menne bie the grene wode tree.

\* \* \* \* \*

Manne.

See! the crokyng brionie  
 Rounde the popler twyste hys spraie;  
 Rounde the oake the greene ivie  
 Florryschethe, and lyveth aie.

Let us seate us bie thys tree,  
 Laughe, and synge to lovyng ayres;  
 Comme, and doe notte coyen bee;  
 Nature made all thynges bie payres.

\* \* \* \* \*

Womanne.

Tempte mee ne to the foule thyng;  
 I wylle no mannes lemanne be;  
 Tyll syr preeste hys songe doethe synge,  
 Thou shalt neere fynde aught of mee.

Manne.

Bie our ladie her yborne,  
 To-morrowe, soone as ytte ys daie,  
 I'lle make thee wyfe, ne bee forsworne,  
 So tyde me lyfe or dethe for aie.

Womanne.

Whatt dothe lette, botte thatte now  
 We attenes, thos honde yn honde,  
 Unto divinistre goe,  
 And bee lyncked yn wedlocke bonde?

Manne.

I agree, and thus I plyghte  
 Honde, and harte, and all that's myne;  
 Goode Syr Rogerr, do us ryghte,  
 Make us one, at Cothbertes shryne.

Bothe.

We wylle ynn a bordelle lyve,  
 Hailie, thoughe of no estate;  
 Everyche clocke moe love shall gyve;  
 Wee ynn godencesse wylle bee greate.

Ælla. v. 87.

I should suppose that you would rather wish to see all the variety of poetical talent of this young favourite of the nine muses. You will certainly allow that he was equal to the tender melancholy of elegy, when I give you some lines from his *Elinoure*, and *Juga*. This poem was sent to the man who deprived himself of the high honour of giving an easy, and effectual protection, and encouragement to Chatterton. It was, indeed, a most extraordinary performance, from a boy. Whether he had sent it as his own, or as the production of another, will always be of very little consequence with generous minds, when they reflect that such poetical excellence was atchieved by tender

years. It would have affected into liberality any literary heart but that of a Walpole.

*Elinoure, and Juga.*

Onne Ruddeborne bank twa pynynge maydens sate;  
Theire teares faste dryppeynge to the waterre cleere;  
Echone bementynge for her absente mate,  
Wha atte Seyncte Albonns shouke the morthynge  
speare.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Juga.*

When mokie clouds do hange upon the leme  
Of leden moon, ynn sylver mantels dyghte;  
The tryppeynge faeries weve the golden dreme  
Of selyness, whyche flyethe wythe the nyghte;  
Thenne (botte the seynctes forbydde!) gif to a spryte  
Syrr Rychardes forme ys lyped, I'll holde dystraughte  
Hys bledeynge claie-colde corse, and die eche daie ynn  
thoughte.

*Elinoure.*

Ah, woe bementynge wordes! what wordes can shewe!  
Thou limed ryver, on thie linche maie bleede  
Champyons, whose bloude wylle wythe thie waterres  
flowe;  
And Rudborne streeme be Rudborne streeme indeede!  
Haste, gentle Juga, tryppe ytte oere the meade,  
To knowe, or wheder we muste waile agayne;  
Or wythe oure fallen knyghtes be menged onne the plain.



Soe sayinge, lyke twa levyn-blasted trees,  
 Or twayne of cloudes that holdeth stormie rayne;  
 Theie moved gentle oere the dewie mees,  
 To where seyncte Albons holie shrynes remayne.  
 There dyd theye fynde that bothe their knyghtes were  
 slayne;

Distraughte theie wandered to swollen Rudbornes syde,  
 Yelled theyre leathalle knelle; sonke ynn the waves, and  
 dyde.

I shall now recite three stanzas from the second\* part of the Battle of Hastings: they contain the most animated, and lively descriptions of the horrors, and the beauties of nature; and of the “pomp, pride, and glorious circumstance of war;” conveyed in that vigorous, and nobly sounding verse, which the subject, and its images require, and deserve. Let it be remarked, here, that Chatterton avowed himself to Mr. Barrett to be the real authour of the first part of the Battle of Hastings. Who, then, can reasonably dispute that he wrote the *second* part? When we reflect on *this* direct avowal,

\* I should have given a quotation or two from the first part of the Battle of Hastings, Chatterton's own avowed work, had it not chiefly contained descriptions of the great variety of wounds by which the heroes fell in battle: it was, in *that* respect, too Homerick for *my* taste.

and on the elegance, and force of composition, in the following lines; can we, for a moment doubt that he was the author of all the poetry which is ascribed to Rowley!

As when the erthe, torne by convulsyons dyre,  
In reaulmes of darkness, hid from human syghte,  
The warring force of water, air, and fyre;  
Brast from the regions of eternal nyghte,  
Thro the darke caverns seeke the reaulmes of lyght;  
Some loftie mountaine, by it's fury torne,  
Dreadfully moves, and causes grete affryght;  
Nowe here, nowe there, majestic nods the bourne,  
And awfulle shakes, mov'd by the Almighty force;  
Whole woods, and forests nod, and ryvers change theyr  
course.

So did the men of war at once advaunce,  
Linkd man to man, enseemed one boddie light;  
Above, a wood, yform'd of bill, and launce,  
That noddyd in the ayre, most straunge to syght.  
Harde as the iron were the menne of mighte;  
Ne neede of slughornes; to enrowse theyr minde;  
Eche shootyng spere yreaden for the fyghte;  
More feerce than fallynge rocks, more swefte than  
wynd,  
With solemne step, by ecchoe made more dyre,  
One single boddie all theie marchd, theyr eyen on fire.

And now the greie-eyd morn with vi'lets drest,  
Shakyng the dew-drops on the flourie meedes,  
Fled with her rosie radiance to the west;

Forth from the easterne gatte the fyerie steedes  
 Of the bright sunne awaytynge spirits leedes :  
 The sunne, in fierie pompe enthroned on hie,  
 Swyfter than thoughte alonge hys jernie gledes,  
 And scatters nyghtes remaynes from oute the skie :  
 He sawe the armies make for bloudie fraie;  
 And stopt his driving steedes, and hid his lyghtsome raye.

Battle of Hastings: Part IId. p. 191.

To warrant all that I have said of Mr. Bryant's critical justice, and taste, let me request you to endure a single quotation from one of his highly admired old English poets. In my manner of introducing this quotation, I shall take care, however, to do ample justice to *his* very extraordinary comparison of one poet with another. It shall be introduced, and followed, with his own words. The quotation is taken from an old poem, entitled, "The Ploughman's Vision;" which was written in the fourteenth century, by Robert Langelande of Cleyberie.—"He  
 "is not only" (says Mr. Bryant) "in respect to diction, as ancient;" [as Rowley] "a circumstance we might well expect; but oftentimes as modern, though  
 "a century before him. But though he  
 "abounds with antique terms, yet his

“ diction is clear, and his words flow for  
 “ the most part in their natural order;  
 “ and his arrangement, in most instan-  
 “ ces, varies very little from that which is  
 “ in use at this day. His lines are often  
 “ extended to fifteen syllables, but gene-  
 “ rally are fewer; and the metre is a kind  
 “ of imperfect anapæstic measure; at-  
 “ tended with an uniform alliteration. I  
 “ will give a *sample* of some of the verses,  
 “ where the poet represents himself as  
 “ taking a view of Nature, which he calls,  
 “ *kind*.”

And slepyng I se all thys, and sythen came *kind*,  
 And named me by name, and bade me nimen hede,  
 And through the wonders of this world wyt to take :  
 And on a mountain in the mydle erth hight as me  
 thought

I was fette forth by ensamples to know,  
 And through ech creature, and kynd, my Creatour to  
 love.

I se the sunne, and the sea, and the sonde after,  
 And where the brydes and beastes by her makes they  
 yeden

Wyld wormes in woodes, and wonderful fowles.

\* \* \* \* \*

Byrdes I beheld that in bushes made nestes ;  
 Had never wyghte wytte to worke the leste.  
 I had wonder at whom and where the pie learned  
 To lygge the stickes, in which she layeth, and breadeth.  
 Nys wryght, as I wene, could worch her nest to pay.

\* \* \* \* \*



And yet me marvelled more, howe many other birds  
 Hydden, and hylden her egges full derne  
 In maryes and mores, for men should hem not find:  
 And hydden her egges, when they therfro went,  
 For fear of other fowles, and for wylde beastes.

\* \* \* \* \*

And sithen I loked on the sea, and so forth on the starres.  
 Many selkouthes I see, but not to se now.  
 I see floures in the frythe and her fayre colours,  
 And how among the grene grasse growed so many huis,  
 And some sour, and some swete; selkought me thought:  
 Of her kindes, and of her coloures to carp it were long.

Ploughman's Vision: fol. 58.

—So much for Pierce Ploughman; alias, Robert Langelande of Cleyberie;—and his *kind of imperfect anapæstic measure*. I beg your pardon for giving you the pain of hearing all this wretched stuff. I thought that in justification of the esteem in which I hold Mr. Bryant's literary merit, to vouch this criterion of his critical acumen, and of the aptitude of his mind to receive poetical impressions, was a duty which I owed to myself. As I did not chuse altogether to murder your patience, I have not quoted as far as the verses which are praised for their high colouring, and which are honoured with the supposition of *Milton's* knowledge,

and imitation of them. I certainly stopped in time: you have lost nothing: what I have quoted is just as good as what follows. It is not improbable that Milton never saw those famous verses: their author has personified human diseases; Milton did the same. Does it follow that Milton took the idea from this Ploughman? The idea was natural, and easy: it was obvious to genius; it might have been laboured into birth by a dunce. But criticks will always take the *circumbendibus* of a Lumkin, instead of the plain, and direct road. They are for ever distorting the common, and easy effects of nature, into the affected, and painful efforts of labour, and art. Thus, while they triumph in their erudition, they only expose their stupidity.

The “Bristowe Tragedie;” or, the “Dethe of Syr Charles Bawdin,” is an uncommonly beautiful poem; it is written with as much accuracy as animation; and though it consists of 392 lines, it has but *one* word which is not perfectly intelligible to English readers, of common education, at this day; another proof, if we want another, that these poems could not

have been written in the fifteenth century. The poem abounds with pathetick, and tragical description; with a pious, and elevated strain of Christian morality; and with the magnanimous eloquence of the dying hero. I flatter myself that some extracts from it will not be unacceptable to my audience. That I may not be too prolix, I must quote it to its disadvantage: for I shall be obliged, in some degree, to break its even, and invigorating connexion.

Wee all must die, quod brave Syr Charles;  
 Whatte bootes ytte howe or whenne;  
 Dethe is the sure, the certaine fate  
 Of all wee mortall menne.

Saye, why, my friend, thie honest soul  
 Runns overr, att thyne eye;  
 Is ytte for my most welcome doome  
 Thatt thou doste child-lyke crye?

\* \* \* \* \*

Before I sawe the lyghtsome sunne,  
 Thys was appointed mee;  
 Shall mortal manne repyne or grudge  
 Whatt Godde ordeynes to bee?

Howe oft ynne battaile have I stooode,  
 Whan thousands dy'd arounde;  
 Whan smokynge streemes of crimson bloode  
 Imbrew'd the fatten'd grounde:

Howe dydd I knowe that ev'ry darte  
 That cutte the airie waie,  
 Myghte nott fynde passage toe *my* harte,  
 And close myne eyes for aie?

And shall I nowe, for feere of dethe  
 Looke wanne, and bee dysmayde?  
 Ne! fromm my herte flie childyshe feere,  
 Be alle the manne display'd.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ynne Londonne citye was I borne,  
 Of parents of grete note;  
 My fadre dydd a nobile armes  
 Emblazon onne hys cote:

I make ne doubte butt hee ys gone  
 Where soone I hope to goe;  
 Where wee for ever shall bee blest,  
 From oute the reech of woe.

Hee taughte mee justice and the laws  
 Wyth pitie to unite;  
 And eke hee taughte mee howe to knowe  
 The wronge cause from the ryghte:

Hee taughte mee wythe a prudent hande  
 To feede the hungrie poore,  
 Ne lett mye servants dryve awaie  
 The hungrie fromme my doore:

And none can saye, butt alle mye lyfe  
 I have hys wordyes kept;  
 And summ'd the actyonns of the daie  
 Eche nyghte before I slept.



I have a spouse, goe aske of her,  
 Yff I defyl'd her bedde?  
 I have a kynge, and none can laie  
 Blacke treason onne my hedde.

\* \* \* \* \*

Whatte tho' I onne a sledde be drawne,  
 And mangled by a hynde,  
 I doe defye the traytor's pou'r;  
 Hee can ne harm my mynde;

Whatte tho' uphoisted onne a pole,  
 Mye lymbes shall rotte ynne ayre  
 And ne ryche monument of brasse  
 Charles Bawdin's name shall bear;

Yett ynne the holie booke above,  
 Whyche tyme can't eate awaie,  
 There wythe the sarvants of the Lorde  
 Mye name shall lyve for aie.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sweet Florence! nowe I praie forbere,  
 Ynne quiet lett mee die;  
 Praie Godde, thatt ev'ry Christian soule  
 May looke onne dethe as I.

Sweet Florence! why these brinie teeres?  
 Theye washe my soule awaie,  
 And almost make mee wyshe for lyfe,  
 Wyth thee, sweete dame, to staie.

'Tys butt a journie I shall goe  
 Untoe the lande of blysse;  
 Nowe, as a prooffe of husbande's love,  
 Receive thys holie kysse.

Then Florence, fault'ring yinne her saie,  
 Tremblynge these wordyes spoke,  
 Ah, cruele Edwarde, bloudie kyngel!  
 My herte ys well nyghe broke:

Ah, sweete Syr Charles! why wylt thou goe,  
 Wythoute thye lovyng wyfe?  
 The cruelle axe thatt cuttes *thye* necke,  
 Ytte eke shall ende *mye* life.

I have reserved for the last magnificent display of the old poetry of this wonderful boy, the greater part of the chorus, with which his second tragedy of *Goddwynn* is concluded. It appears to me that for propriety, and sublimity of sentiment, imagery, and personification, with which this chorus is superlatively distinguished, the boasted talent in writing odes, of the Greek, and Roman schools, must yield the palm to Mr. Bryant's charity-scholar of Bristol; who seems, here, in the dawn of youth, to enter the lists, and to maintain a glorious, and a dubious tournament, with our immortal Dryden; an old, and hoary, but vigorous, and accomplished cavalier; clad in the splendid panoply of poetical armour;—*cruda deo, viridisque senecta*.

Part of the chorus which concludes  
the tragedy of Goddwyn:

Whan Freedom, dreste yn blodde-steyned veste,  
To everie knyghte her warre-songe sunge,  
Uponne her hedde wylde wedes were spredde ;  
A gorie anlace bye her honge.

She daunced onne the heathe ;

She hearde the voice of deathe ;

Pale-eyned affryghte, hys harte of sylver hue,

In wayne assayled her bosomme to acale ;

She hearde onflemmed the shriekynge voice of woe ;

And sadnesse in the owlette shake the dale.

She shooke the burlde speere,

On hie she jeste her sheelde,

Her foemen all appere,

And flizze alonge the feelde.

Power, wythe his heafod straught ynto the skyes,

Hys speere, a sonne-beame, and his sheelde, a starre,

Alyche twaie brendeynge gronfyres rolls hys eyes,

Chaftes with hys yronne feete, and soundes to war.

She syttes upon a rocke,

She bendes before hys speere ;

She ryces from the shocke ;

Wioldynge her owne yn ayre.

In this chorus he hath personified power with an almost unequalled expression, force, and sublimity. Permit me again to recite four lines of that personification; after having modernized the old words; that the creating genius of the poet may

have a more unobstructed, and stronger effect:

Power, with his head exalted to the skies ;  
 His spear, a sun-beam ; and his shield a star ;  
 Flashing their flame, like meteors, rolls his eyes ;  
 Stamps with his iron feet, and sounds to war.

Here, you surely have poetical invention; here you have the grand imagery of the epick strain;—Algarotti's *gigantesca sublimita Miltoniana*, in perfection: and all this you have from a poor boy, of extremely hard fortune, and circumscribed opportunities; and which he probably wrote in his fifteenth year. Now, I declare, before this respectable assembly, that I should have been so queer, absurd, and romantick a merchant (if my fate had sunk me down to the squalid mines of Peru, instead of leading me to the laurel-groves of Academus) that for these astonishing bursts of genius, I should have forgiven the unexperienced youth,—with a gentle, and divine remonstrance, which I wish that in many cases we could practically adopt;—“ go, and sin no more, lest “ a worse thing befall thee;”—I should have forgiven him, if he had even com-



mitted a forgery on my counting-house. Let not the cautious be shocked; let not the obdurate rail; my sacrifice to poetry would have been sanctioned by the sacrifice which I owed to christianity; which I owed to *genuine morality*. He was of a tender, and flexible age; and that tenderness, and flexibility, conducted by a humane, and generous hand, would have raised him to a high maturity, and stabiliment in virtue. The juvenile nobleness of soul that would have been reared, and invigorated by an *Allworthy*, was depressed, and chilled to death, by a *Walpole*. I know that for the legal felony which I have mentioned, our commercial Indians would immediately have raised the war-whoop, and have had him by the neck. But I trust that I have not so *learned*, or, to speak properly, *unlearned Christ*. I trust that I have not so far forgotten some good *heathenish* doctrines of disinterested humanity; of moral expansion: I trust that I am not such a prejudiced, and national dupe to unequal, and sanguinary laws; of which the very unreflecting, and precipitate rigour, is the principal cause, in an *exemplary* view, of

their ineffectual, and despised execution. What, then, shall we think of the cold, and hard reflexions; of the cruel, and insulting epithets, and titles, which were heaped on the memory of extreme genius, and misfortune, by the prudence, and sanctity of the age; for impositions which did no injury to an individual, or to society; and which, if they had not, to good, and warm hearts, been redeemed by their glory, would have been pardoned by them, for the youth of the offender, and for the smallness of the offence. The effects of those impositions would have been almost perfectly innocent, if they had not produced a disputatious, and uncharitable fever in the spiritual constitutions of the discreet saints of the earth; if they had not excited *tantas iras animis celestibus*.

I come now to Chatterton's miscellanies; to the pieces which were published with his own name; and most of which are written in a modern style. Here Mr. Bryant erects his antique triumphal arch of criticism: here, crowned with a civick wreath, as the victorious champion for the poetical honours of *old* England, he loudly claims for his much injured,

and insulted Rowley, the foolishly disputed laurel. According to the various formation of the mind of man, it was, unfortunately in human fate, that I should differ extremely from this gentleman in my literary, and poetical sentiments, and taste. The very strongest evidences, in *his* judgement, which he brings to prove the truth of his rivetted opinion, or rather of his absolute certainty, beyond a shadow of doubt; in *my* humble opinion, invincibly demonstrate the reverse. The flight of the muse must be directed to the elevation of her objects; the miscellaneous, and modern poems of Chatterton were occasional productions; they were written on subjects of inferiour dignity to those which inspired his old poetry; and which therefore demanded a greater vigour, and sublimity of numbers. But even in *these* compositions of a secondary *pith, and moment*, a genius of the most happy versatility; richly various, beautiful, grand, and masterly; with powers infinitely beyond his years, may be distinctly, and prominently seen, by unprejudiced, and sensible readers; who are unaffectedly susceptible of the warmth,

and delight which are communicated by poetry. But these high poetical properties, however brightly they shone in the works of Chatterton, were not seen by Mr. Bryant. I wish that some friendly angel had purged *the visual nerve* of his mind with heavenly *euphrasy, and rue*;—*for he had much to see*; a luminous, and singular phænomenon, in the regions of intellect; a human sun, darting meridian ardour, and effulgence, in its early day. He was accessory, himself, to the defects of his mental opticks; the thick mist of the scholastick atmosphere, had *quenched*, or the *dim suffusion* of antiquity, and Rowley, had *veiled* them.

In all the strictures, and remarks of this hypercritical gentleman on the acknowledged works of Chatterton, there is a cynical fastidiousness, which betrays a great want of taste; an ignorance of good, and spirited writing. He has quoted a part of his Essay on the Origin, Nature, and Design of Sculpture; to show that he was unacquainted with his subject; and that he was a poor proficient in the use of our language. If there are *some* inaccuracies in his account of the progress of



the art of sculpture, they could only have been uncandidly observed by petulance, austerity, and moroseness: every critick, who honourably deserves the name, would have admired the diligence which had procured him so much knowledge of the subject, at his early age, and in his embarrassing situations. As to the language, or style of that essay, I assert, without hesitation, that both in spirit, and propriety, it is infinitely superiour to Mr. Bryant's, which is, in general vulgar, and uncooth. If any person will take the trouble to compare the two authours, as writers of prose, he will not charge me with having made too hasty, and peremptory an assertion. His British, and Saxon pieces, in the manner of Fingal, and what he has written in old English, in his miscellanies, show that surprizing fertility, and fire of imagination, and that almost equally surprizing knowledge of the ancient language, which he displayed to greater advantage, in his more studied, and venerable compositions. His "Apostate Will:" a poem which he wrote when he was but eleven years old, characterizes the extraordinary genius who

might have been, afterwards, the authour of Rowley: as an early opening of great talents, it is certainly as rare a phænomenon as Mr. Pope's Ode on Solitude, which he wrote when he had passed his twelfth year. The quotation of a part of it will perhaps not be unacceptable.

In days of old, when Wesley's power  
 Gathered new strength, by every hour;  
 Apostate Will, just sunk in trade,  
 Resolved his bargain should be made;  
 Then streight to Wesley he repairs,  
 And puts on grave, and solemn airs;  
 Then thus the pious man addressed;  
 Good Sir, I think *your* doctrine best;  
 Your servant will a Wesley be;  
 Therefore the principles teach me.  
 The preacher then instructions gave,  
 How he in this world should behave.  
 He hears, assents, and gives a nod;  
 Says every word's the word of God;  
 Then lifting his dissembling eyes,  
 How blessed is the sect! he cries,  
 Nor Bingham, Young, nor Stillingfleet  
 Shall make me from this sect retreat.  
 He then his circumstance declared;  
 How hardly with him matters fared;  
 Begged him, next meeting, for to make  
 A small collection, for his sake;  
 The preacher said, do not repine;  
 The whole collection shall be thine.

With looks demure, and cringing bows,  
 About his business streight he goes ;  
 His outward acts were grave, and prim;  
 The Methodist appeared in him;  
 But be his outward what it will;  
 His heart was an apostate's still;  
 He'd oft profess an hallowed flame;  
 And every-where preached Wesley's name;  
 He was a preacher, and what not;  
 As long as money could be got;  
 He'd oft profess, with holy fire,  
 The labourer's worthy of his hire.

You will allow the verses to be extraordinary, if you consider the age at which they were written. Mr. Bryant, on every occasion, equally rejects information, and conviction, when they are against the object which *he* arrogates. From what equitable reasoning could he conclude that the reading of our manly youth was narrow, and superficial, when he might have seen, from the verses which I have now quoted, that in his eleventh year, those great divines, Bingham, Young, and Stillingfleet, were not unknown to him?

One of his miscellaneous pieces is the "*Death of Nicou*;" an African eclogue. Here Mr. Bryant gives us a long rhapsody of undigested, and confused criticism;

with his usual strictures of contempt on the illiterate youth; for having made the Tiber an African, and Arabian river. The eclogue is written with a great variety, richness, and force of imagination; and in very strong, and musical numbers. This is enough for *my* fair purpose; as a proof of bold, and persevering genius, it is worthy of its authour; especially if we reflect that it is one of his latest performances; and that it therefore must have been written, as several of his miscellanies were, in awful, and appalling circumstances; under the gripe of famine, and with the prospect of approaching death. This poem, as I have observed, affords a new topick for Mr. Bryant's exultation in the "ignorance of the boy;"—for could any instance have more evidently proved him to be extremely illiterate? He has made the *Roman* the *African* Tiber! But to this charge, which, at first sight, may seem to demonstrate his unacquaintance with polite reading, I shall honestly, and, I hope, satisfactorily answer. Absolute maturity of judgment, even in the application of proper names, is not reasonably to be expected



from the age of seventeen years. It is not improbable that he sometimes committed voluntary, and premeditated mistakes; to envelop in the darker uncertainty the authour of Rowley. But in the présent case I have no need of this supposition. And can any man, in his senses, suppose that the youth who had read seventy authours when he was eleven years old, had not, in his eighteenth year, read translations of the Classicks, which would have informed him that the Tiber was a river of Italy? But Chatterton, still animated by the muse; urged by want; and negligent, from despondency, in his choice of proper names for his African eclogues, seems to have been determined merely by agreeable, and magnificent sound. I should suppose that a quotation from the second eclogue to which I have referred, would convince every impartial reader, of true, poetical discernment, that *he* who wrote it was equal to his old poetry. This truth, indeed, is corroborated by many passages in his miscellanies.

On Tiber's banks ; Tiber, whose waters glide,  
 In slow meanders, down to Gaigra's side ;  
 And circling all the horrid mountain round,  
 Rushes impetuous to the deep profound ;  
 Rolls o'er the ragged rocks, with hideous yell ;  
 Collects its waves beneath the earth's vast shell ;  
 There, for awhile, in loud confusion hurled,  
 It crumbles mountains down, and shakes the world ;  
 Till borne upon the pinions of the air,  
 Through the rent earth the bursting waves appear ;  
 Fiercely propelled, the whitened billows rise,  
 Break from the cavern, and ascend the skies ;  
 Then lost, and conquered by superiour force,  
 Through hot Arabia holds its rapid course.  
 On Tiber's banks, where scarlet jasmines bloom ;  
 And purple aloes shed a rich perfume ;  
 Where, when the sun is melting in his heat,  
 The reeking tygers find a cool retreat ;  
 Bask in the sedges, lose the sultry beam,  
 And wanton with their shadows in the stream ;—  
 —On Tiber's banks, by sacred priests revered,  
 Where, in the days of old, a God appeared :—  
 —'Twas in the dead of night, at Chalma's feast,  
 The tribe of Alra slept around the priest.  
 He spoke ; as evening thunders bursting near,  
 His horrid accents broke upon the ear.  
 Attend, Alraddas, with your sacred priest !  
 This day the sun is rising in the east ;  
 The sun, which shall illumine all the earth,  
 Now, now is rising in a mortal birth.  
 He vanished, like a vapour of the night,  
 And sunk away in a faint blaze of light.  
 Swift from the branches of the holy oak,  
 Horror, confusion, fear, and torment broke ;

And still, when midnight trims her mazy lamp,  
 They take their way through Tiber's watery swamp,  
 On Tiber's banks, close ranked, a warring train,  
 Stretched to the distant edge of Galca's plain;  
 So, when arrived at Gaigra's highest steep,  
 We view the wide expansion of the deep;  
 See, in the gilding of her watery robe,  
 The quick declension of the circling globe;  
 From the blue sea a chain of mountains rise,  
 Blended, at once, with water, and with skies;  
 Beyond our sight, in vast extension curled;  
 The check of waves; the guardians of the world\*.

Death of Nicou.

Let us then leave geographical, and topographical distinctions, and such common triumphs, to mathematical land-surveyors, and frigid criticks. Let us, like men, feel the soul of the poet, with all his little pardonable errors, whether they proceeded from consistent design, or from deplorable accident. Let us be eager to forgive the absurdities of a great mind, while it is eclipsed, in glory. Let it, with the extravagance of an Ariosto, remove mountains, and transfuse rivers into new regions; its fame cannot be

\* I will not say that these verses are altogether free from tautology, and bombast: but they are certainly most uncommonly distinguished by real energy, magnificence, and harmony; when we consider the age of the poet.

stung to death by a swarm of antiquarians. *One* miracle is beyond its power; a particle of its soul, even by reflexion, will never transmigrate into the body of a critic. I care not *where* it makes its Tiber flow, if delightfully borne, in fancy, along its rapid stream, it carries me beyond the reach of literary wasps, and drones.

His poetical epistle to Miss Bush of Bristol is an affecting picture of melancholy fortune, and of the despair of love. Dr. Gregory must have had a singular penetration, when he discovered in these natural, and easy lines, a resemblance to the uninteresting, to the disgusting conceits; to the metaphysical stuff of Cowley.

Before I seek the dreary shore,  
Where Gambia's rapid billows roar,  
And foaming pour along;  
To *you* I urge the plaintive strain;  
And though a lover sings in vain,  
Yet you shall hear the song.  
Ungrateful, cruel, lovely maid;  
Since all my torments were repaid  
With frowns, or languid sneers;  
With assiduities no more  
Your captive will your health implore;  
Or teize you with his tears.  
Now to the regions where the sun  
Does his hot course of glory run,



And parches up the ground;  
 Where o'er the burning, cleaving plains,  
 A long, eternal dog-star reigns,  
 And splendour flames around:  
 There will I go; yet not to find  
 A fire intenser than my mind,  
 Which burns, a constant flame:  
 There will I lose thy heavenly form;  
 Nor shall remembrance, raptured, warm,  
 Draw shadows of thy frame.  
 In the rough element, the sea,  
 I'll drown the softer subject, Thee;  
 And sink each lovely charm;  
 No more my bosom shall be torne;  
 No more by wild ideas borne,  
 I'll cherish the alarm.  
 Yet, Polly, could thy heart be kind,  
 Soon would my feeble purpose find  
 Thy sway within my breast:—  
 But hence, soft scenes of painted woe;—  
 Spite of the dear delight I'll go;—  
 Forget her, and be blest.

His elegy to the memory of Mr. Thomas Phillips, of Fairford, an amiable friend, and, a brother poet, the last of his miscellaneous performances of which I shall take a view, abounds with the characteristicks of his Rowley. The picture of winter, and of fancy, drawn by a very juvenile mind, are worthy of Shakespeare, or of Milton: they announce the aspiring,

and adventurous prodigy, who, with a bold and resistless hand, tore his maturity from the slow march of time. In the oracular language of poetry they proclaim the indisputable author of *Ælla*; of Sir Charles Bawdin; of the battle of Hastings; and of all their other splendid companions. “I am the man”—says the writer of this elegy:—the oracle is accepted; it is rejected by none but by the deaf adder, who stoppeth his ears; and “refuseth to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely.”—

When golden autumn, wreathed in ripened corn,  
From purple clusters pressed the foamy wine;  
Thy genius did his sallow brows adorn;  
And made the beauties of the season thine.

Pale, rugged winter, bending o’er his tread;  
His grizzled hair bedropt with icy dew;  
His eyes, a dusky light, congealed, and dead;  
His robe, a tinge of bright, ethereal blue:

His train, a motleyed, sanguine, sable cloud,  
He limps along the russet, dreary moor;  
Whilst rising whirlwinds, blasting, keen, and loud,  
Roll the white surges to the sounding shore.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fancy, whose various, figure-tinctured vest,  
Was ever changing to a different hue:

Her head, with varied bays, and flowerets drest,  
Her eyes, two spangles of the morning-dew :

In dancing attitude she swept *thy* string ;  
And now she soars, and now again descends ;  
And now reclining on the zephyr's wing,  
Unto the velvet-vested mead she bends.

Elegy on Mr. Phillips.

I flatter myself that I have the honour of thinking, and feeling with *you*, when the poetry of Chatterton is our object. I shall give you Mr. Bryant's opinion of his talents, and acquirements; and then it will be in *your* power to judge by what pretensions that gentleman arrogates the respectable province of a poetical critick. Indeed he seems to *me* so ill qualified for that important office (*important*, as long as *poetry* shall be dear to ingenuous minds) and he seems likewise so insensible to the height of merit, and to the depth of distress, in *humble* life, that I have retaliated his unworthy, his barbarous treatment of Chatterton, with that unreserved and independent censure, which became a writer who hath devoted a great part of his literary exertions to the admiration of genius, and to the contempt of

fortune. My persevering honesty has been of more external disadvantage to me than my desultory faults; but I have too good an opinion of *your* generosity to apprehend that this troublesome companion will make my *present* situation tremble. At all events, there is a reflecting substance within us, which atones for our painful conflict in stemming the swell of the world. *That* world I should *yet* wish to please; but on *fair* terms. Age accumulates the debts which an old man owes to himself; and it imperiously urges their liquidation: it urges him to be particularly careful, not to temporize, on the brink of eternity; but *then*, with a peculiar care, and assiduity, to strengthen, and condense the habits which his calm, and unprejudiced reason had always most approved.

“ I must confess” (says Mr. Bryant)  
 “ that I see nothing of this prematurity  
 “ of abilities in Chatterton; nor of the  
 “ store of information which so far ex-  
 “ ceeded his term of life; much less that  
 “ comprehension, and that activity of  
 “ understanding, with which he is said to  
 “ have been gifted. I cannot perceive



“ any traces of these wonderful qualities.  
 “ I believe there are many clerks, and  
 “ apprentices in town, who, by reading  
 “ plays, and magazines, and by frequent-  
 “ ing the theatres, get a better knack of  
 “ writing than was to be found in Chat-  
 “ terton. His bad success, in his last  
 “ stage of life, shows that he did not an-  
 “ swer the expectations of those who  
 “ employed him.”

On the savage remark which closes this  
 passage, I have already given my senti-  
 ments.—“ The poems which have the  
 “ name of Rowley affixed to them” (says  
 this judicious critick) “ are certainly very  
 “ fine ; but those which we know assured-  
 “ ly to have been composed by Chatter-  
 “ ton, fall very short of such excellence.  
 “ The best of them do not rise above me-  
 “ diocrity ; and many are very low, and  
 “ abject ; and cannot be held in *any* de-  
 “ gree of estimation.”—Bryant pp. 491  
 502.

To insult the memory of Chatterton  
 was as stupid as it was inhuman : to in-  
 sult the common sense ; the common  
 perceptions of mankind, was the utmost  
 degree of insolence. Suffer a little more

of this elegant, and liberal critick.—  
 “ When *they*” (his most sanguine friends)  
 “ speak of him as a prodigy, they found  
 “ their notion chiefly upon those sing-  
 “ song compositions in verse, which he  
 “ wrote to some young women at Bristol,  
 “ and to other friends; and which may  
 “ be looked upon as very tolerable, for a  
 “ person so young. But these persons  
 “ never give the least hint about any his-  
 “ torical knowledge; nor mention *any*  
 “ *writer of consequence* WHICH he had  
 “ read.”—p. 562.—To dwell on this ab-  
 surd, and arrogant stuff, would give it  
 too much consequence. But Master Bry-  
 ant, if you please, with all your taunts  
 about Chatterton’s ignorance, or super-  
 ficiality, you have openly allowed that  
 he was conversant with Shakespeare,  
 Milton, and Thomson; and, I pray, are  
 not *they* writers of some little conse-  
 quence? Ah! Mr. Bryant! Illi, quot  
 critici; quot Antiquarii!

Where he charges Chatterton with that  
 cruelty (which was infinitely more appli-  
 cable to himself, and to his friend of  
 Exeter) for his just, but very moderate  
 freedom with Mr. Walpole, the stress

that he lays on that person's rank, and character, is as mean, and servile, as his treatment of our young poet was ungenerous, and overbearing. Chatterton was, at first, more gentle to Mr. Walpole; and ultimately far more liberal to him than he deserved. He had a perishable, a vamped up character; a meretricious varnish, with which he was fashionably decorated by sable gowns, and blue stockings: but, as a writer that was much talked of, there have been few more inelegant, and feeble:—as a *man*, I hope that there have been few, of less beneficent dispositions. If two or three instances are obtruded on me, instead of a confutation of what I assert, by any poor logician on our ethical duties, I shall reply, that *I* have my moral distinctions, if *he* has *not*. If a person who is notoriously parsimonious in acts of beneficence, takes it into his head to heap favours on a few individuals, who neither want them, nor can bring any genuine, any conspicuous title to them, you may term *this*, profusion; whim; caprice; dotage; a selfish repayment of adulation;—*any* thing but *true generosity*. *That* godlike

virtue, when it is the master of corresponding external power, is inquisitive, and indefatigable, to find, and to reward merit; to relieve distress; and to recompense that humble industry which has long been its faithful servant. How far the late Lord Orford was entitled to the praise which is always due to *these* glorious actions, surely the world, unless it is still hoodwinked by prejudices, may, by *this* time, easily, and accurately determine. The gold, which is, in general, cruelly spared, is, sometimes, absurdly lavished. As to *rank, that*, of itself, is nothing; it reflects respect, or contempt, as it is connected with the virtues, or with the vices of its owner: it may be the high-seated, and hereditary citadel of well-maintained honour; or it may be the conspicuous, and permanent pillory of personal disgrace.

I hope that many of my observations on the writings, and fate of Chatterton, will tend to illustrate a neglected, but indisputable truth; that when these reading, and plodding men presume to feel, and describe the bright emanations of the mind; and justly, and forcibly to discri-



minate great, and original characters; they desert the narrow walk to which they were destined by nature; and trespass on the blooming, and variegated ground, which is, by *her* allotted to souls of a more extensive range. Warm sentiment, as well as vigorous reason, is requisite to enable us properly to judge of poetical excellence, and of poetical faults; and if we possess *this* degree of sentiment, and reason, it will adjust, and impassion our language, when we write on these interesting subjects. Therefore the authours to whom I now refer, know as much of poetry (as I have remarked before) as Junius's late right honourable senator knew of blushing; or as a man born blind knows of scarlet or sky-blue.

As my unfortunate, but well-intended literary efforts must soon have an end, I wish not to be negligent, and idle, at the last: nay, I wish to work with double diligence. I shall be anxious to counteract with watchfulness, and assiduity, that indolence, and those infirmities, which gradually, but impressively, make their daily inroads on old age. Humanity will ever view them with a sympathetick

eye; but to resist their oppression as far as is possible, is the natural, and congruous part of that spirit which has never yielded to the most mortifying circumstances; to the most alarming prospects. Consistently with this long strain of conduct, it was my determination to take a large, and if I was equal to it, a complete view, of my present great, but melancholy subject. I shall, therefore, make some particular references to Mr. Walpole's defence of his treatment of Chatterton, as it is detailed in the Gentleman's Magazine of 1782. The defence makes a long letter to the editor of Chatterton's Miscellanies. By these references you will be sufficiently acquainted both with the benevolent disposition, and with the elegance, and force of *Mr. Nichols's masterly, and admirable writer*. I wish that I could paint so durably as to transmit both the poet, and the peer, in their genuine form, and colours, to a late posterity. Such pictures are interesting; they are useful to society. They may stimulate, and fortify genius; they may moderate the insolence of wealth, and title, they may make obduracy *appear* to soften.

In the object which is now immediately before me, there is something to console, and flatter an old man's love of ease. The passages of Mr. Walpole's defence, to which I shall refer, will not require many accurate animadversions; many well-merited strictures. In the *citation* of such passages, their answer, and the condemnation of their authour are included. It is often, providentially, the nature, and the sublunary punishment of guilt, not to move a step, without being caught in its own toils.

I shall first desire your attention to Mr. Walpole's behaviour, on Chatterton's very respectful application to him for his interest, to remove him from the dull drudgery of an attorney's apprentice, and to procure for him some little establishment, compatible with his elegant studies, and with his most laudable, and well-grounded poetical ambition. No situation could be more unfavourable to literary improvement, and taste, than that to which *his* early life was doomed; and no generous man; no liberal judge of human nature; no soul warmly impressed by the muses, would have hesitated to befriend the au-

thour of those specimens of high poetical excellence which accompanied his application. The absolute certainty that *he* was the authour of them; and that they were not written in the fifteenth century, would have impelled, instead of preventing Mr. Walpole to assist him; if he had not been very deficiently sensible of his own faults (however plausible he was on that subject) and if he had not, therefore, been an *exactor* of perfection from the first, and unexperienced moral sense of youth; especially if that youth was *poor*, and *friendless*.

After the natural inquiries, in consequence of Chatterton's letter, Mr. Walpole found that he had given a true account of himself; his family; and his situation. Neither this account, however, nor the proofs of *miraculous* genius, as he afterwards termed it, with little amplification, could prevail with *his* heart to rescue the young poet from the worst of captivities; from the captivity of the mind; from digging, as the slave of Lambert, in the Peruvian mines of the law. *That* attorney seems to have been as insensible, or impassive a creature, to the



stupendous talents of the boy, as his *other* Bristol friends. I have said that Mr. Walpole could not prevail with his *heart*; *that* heart during its long pulsation, never warmed; never dilated; never felt a propensity to blend the flow of benevolence with the Castalian fountain. It *is*, or it easily *may* be well known, that he was, all his life, the enemy of illustrious authours; unjust to the dead; injurious to the living. But in the present emergency, if something useful is not done, something specious must be written; for this actor of virtue well knew that while a hypocrite retains his discretion; while he saves his appearances, he, and the world will always be on a very fair footing with each other. Accordingly he sate down, and gave him a bill on the sacred bank of morality; this was *one* bold species of forgery; for I never could find that in *that* bank, he had any real capital. He wrote to him a letter of *advice*; the constant substitute, with frozen souls, for good offices, when they are requested. I grow old, and forget; but I think that I have heard, or read, that there are three things which a man will do for you, who

will never be prevailed with to do any thing better; he will give you a pinch of snuff;—a letter of recommendation, if you are going abroad;—and good advice; if you are distressed, or starving. Not only to meet the unfortunate, and the deserving, with kind looks, and kind actions, but to enquire where they *are*; that with these looks, and these actions, they *may* meet them; is the christianity of the *Kyrles*, and the *Allens*:—the pinch of snuff;—the letter of recommendation;—the good advice, is the jesuitism of the *Walpoles*.

He tells us that “ he wrote him a letter “ with as much kindness, as if he had “ been his guardian.” *This cannot* be true; for if it *had* been true, our voluntary, affectionate, and christian guardian, would have given his poor, unprotected ward, some *substantial* mark of his compassion. When on any urgent occasion, we have the power to do much good, and presume to *mimick* real goodness; when, on *that* occasion, we assume a sympathy which we do not feel; and only preach, and advise; all our boasted tenderness is mere pretence; a shameful insincerity.

But it is *my* wonder, that this primitive taint, of a conscience inexpressibly tender, when he advised his *miraculous* young genius to persevere, with content, and resignation, in tugging at Lambert's oar, and to endeavour to discharge his filial obligations to his mother; did not strongly represent to him the horrid crime of his poetical forgeries; and strenuously remonstrate against any future practice of such a dreadful kind of imposture. He only informs Chatterton that better judges than himself doubted the authenticity of the manuscripts. No man, indeed, was less entitled than Mr. Walpole, to reprehend him for transferring his literary claims to an imaginary person; as I shall, hereafter, show.

With an ungrateful return for all this paternal, and anxious piety, we are told that the person on whom it was bestowed, sent "rather a peevish answer." The truth of this charge is by no means proved. He only said that "he would not contend with a person of Mr. Walpole's learning; and desired that his poems might be returned." But the opinion which even a *pigmy*, of wealth, and fashi-

on entertains of his own magnitude, is so enormous, that if a person of accidental inferiority expresses the least disapprobation of his conduct, he may think himself treated with extraordinary indulgence, if he is only insulted with the accusation of *peevishness*. But the pampered, spoiled, and grown children, whose ears are, every day, lulled with the eunuch trill of flattery; and who, therefore, cannot endure the manly voice of honest, independent, and *salutary* truth, (if it was properly accepted, and regarded;)—*these* are the *peevish* beings. I shall now quote three very curious paragraphs from Mr. Walpole's defence. They will demand some ingenuous, and explicit observations. “When I received this letter” (the proper letter, in which the return of the poems was desired) “I was going to Paris, in a day or two; and either forgot his request of the poems; or perhaps not having time to have them copied, deferred complying till my return, which was to be in six weeks. I protest I do not remember which was the case; and yet, though *in a cause of so little importance*, I will not utter a syllable of



“ which I am not positively certain; nor  
 “ will charge my memory with a tittle be-  
 “ yond what it retains.”—“ Soon after  
 “ my return from France, I received  
 “ another letter from Chatterton, the  
 “ style of which was *singularly imperti-*  
 “ *nent*. He demanded his poems rough-  
 “ ly; and added, that I would not have  
 “ *dared* to use him so ill, if he had not  
 “ acquainted me with the narrowness of  
 “ his circumstances.”—“ My heart did  
 “ not accuse me of insolence to him. I  
 “ wrote an answer, expostulating with  
 “ him on his injustice, and *renewing good*  
 “ *advice*. But upon second thoughts,  
 “ reflecting that *so wrong-headed a young*  
 “ *man*, of whom I knew nothing, and  
 “ whom I had never seen, might be absurd  
 “ enough to print my letter, I flung it  
 “ into the fire; and wrapping up both his  
 “ poems, and letters, without taking a  
 “ copy of either, for which I am now sor-  
 “ ry, I returned all to him, and thought  
 “ no more of *him* or *them*, till about a  
 “ year and a half after, &c.”—Gentle-  
 man’s Magazine, May 1782, p. 248—I  
 have nothing to say to his going to Paris;  
 it deserves no consideration. But I shall

frankly say that to detain Chatterton's manuscripts, six weeks, after what had passed between them, was the height of insolence, and barbarity. I will not say that a mind of exalted morality—I will say that a mind of *common* generosity would be particularly careful not to give pain to the unfortunate, when it might be easily prevented. A being, indeed, of a superiour order of virtue would be religiously tenacious of answering more expeditiously the letter of a *poor* than of a *rich* man; that the mind of the former might not possibly be wounded with the apprehension that he was despised. But *this* doctrine to Mr. Walpole would have been a dissertation on colours to a man born blind.

I believe that I have already given my opinion of the manly, and spirited reply with which the poet very justly resented Mr. Walpole's long epistolary silence, and detention of his papers. I have mentioned the effect which it would have produced on a generous mind. But as the mind to which it was addressed was of a very different constitution, its phlegmatick pride pronounced the letter in which

that censure was contained, “ a singularly impertinent letter.”—The letter was so far from being impertinent, that it was gentler than the haughty neglect deserved. I wish that the treatment which external weakness too often experiences from external power, would warrant me to assert that Mr. Walpole’s behaviour, during the short epistolary intercourse between *Chatterton*, and *him*, was *singularly insolent*.

*Chatterton*, in his last letter to *Walpole*, asserted, that he would not have dared to use him so ill, if he had not been acquainted with the disadvantages of his situation. Of the truth of *this* assertion there can be no reasonable doubt. If the son of a lord had teized Mr. Walpole with fifty letters, containing the most insignificant stuff, they would all have been answered, with the most respectful punctuality.

His inconsistent insolence is continually breaking forth. He calls the correspondence with which he was very unworthily honoured by *Chatterton*, “ *a cause of so little importance.*” Was the fate, then, was any transaction of your *miracle*

of poetical genius, of *so* little importance? I would rather have a faithful account of *one* of *Chatterton's* serious conversations with his friends, than of *all* that *you*, *Mr. Walpole*, through your long life, thought, and said, and wrote. Unimportant as you have been pleased to term the cause, I shall apply to a very *little*, what *Mr. Pope* applied to a very *great* man: I hope that it will “damn *you* to everlasting fame.” Unimportant as the cause *was*, it drove *you* to the most pitiable subterfuges. For I strongly suspect that the letter containing new, good, and gratuitous advice, which *Mr. Walpole* flung into the fire, was a mere airy forgery of that gentleman's active, and tremulous imagination. He disapproved of his own conduct; he thought that it would be disapproved by the humane part of the world; hence he invented the pretended crime of the pretended letter; and hence he protracted the little stratagem of affected candour. But why should he have dreaded *Chatterton's* publication of this letter? Could he imagine that a renewal of that good advice which he made so highly meritorious, would have hurt him with



the publick? I have a right to suspect imposition, when the suspected imposition is in the neighbourhood of palpable falsehoods. But that after he had sent him his poems, and letters, he thought no more of *him* or *them*, for a year and a half;—*this* assertion, if we consider the substance, and circumstances of the whole case, must be a direct, and impudent *lie*. I should use improper terms; I should entertain too moderate a resentment against the most absurd, and insolent falsehood, if I gave this effrontery softer language. Whatever Mr. Walpole might pretend, he often *thought* of Chatterton, before his final catastrophe; and as there is a Divine moral economy, even in *this* world, he thought of him with remorse, and fear.

“ Was my giving him advice” (says he) “ neglect? was my returning his papers, “ without a word of reproach on *his* arrogance, arrogant?”—Ibid. p. 193. I am so sick of your *advice*, that I wish to turn away my mind from thinking of it. Every school-boy will tell you, that to return papers, and letters, (especially after an unreasonable, and shamefully long

detention of them) without a word of answer to the preceding letter, is more expressive of contempt, and indeed of resentment, than the most resentful, and contemptuous language. And *this* was *your* arrogant return to a fine and noble spirit; with whom, if you had had a congenial spirit, you would have respectfully acknowledged your negligence, and ardently espoused his fortune.

I must here give you another passage of this perplexed, confused, unaccountable apologist.—“ Another reflexion occurs to me, and probably will to my accusers. I have complained of Chatterton’s unwarrantable letter to me, on my not returning his MSS. Shall I not be told, that I probably did not restore to him *that* letter, I believe I did *not*, I believe I preserved it; but what is become of it in nine years, I cannot say;— I have lost, or mislaid it. If I find it, it shall be submitted to every possible scrutiny of the expert, before I produce it as genuine:—and though I hope to be believed that such letter I *did* receive, and did mention to several persons long before I was charged with ill-treatment

“ of Chatterton, I desire no imputation  
 “ should lie on his memory, beyond what  
 “ his character, and my unprovoked as-  
 “ sertions render probable. I could not  
 “ feel regret on his re-demand of MSS.  
 “ on which I had set no esteem. I might  
 “ have preserved copies both of the poems,  
 “ and of his letters, if I had been willing. No  
 “ adequate reason can be given why I re-  
 “ turned all *promiscuously*, but *his* insult,  
 “ and my own indifference.”—Ibid. p.  
 300.—The reflection that he probably  
 did not restore to Chatterton what he  
 calls the unwarrantable letter, with the  
 other papers, could not naturally have  
 occurred either to his accusers, or to his  
 friends: both parties would have been  
 morally certain that it *was* returned,  
 agreeably to the nature, and constant  
 practice of such transactions. The con-  
 trary reflection could only have occurred  
 to his own dark, perplexed, and malig-  
 nant mind; at once meditating false cri-  
 mination, and blundering apologies, to  
 give it some appearance of truth. Can-  
 dour itself, therefore, must own it to be  
 very odd that he did not return to Chat-  
 terton his unfortunate, and obnoxious

letter, when he sent to him all his other papers. It seems that it was lost, or mislaid.—*These* circumstances, and the formal manner in which he proposes to have its authenticity ascertained, “before he produces it as genuine,” must excite, in the most unsuspicious minds, a doubt that it ever existed. The apparent tenderness which he here shows for the memory of Chatterton, and the cruel aspersions, with which, in other places, he insults it, are glaring proofs of the dark, and cowardly assassin of reputation. The utmost despotism of a despicable arrogance alone could make him imagine that the letter in question could be, in *any* view, disadvantageous to the memory of the youth. It redounded entirely to his honour. In one period, we are told, that he retained the dreadfully daring letter; and almost in the next, that he returned *all promiscuously*. People who have a certain base habit, should likewise have a good memory. Chatterton’s *insult*, and Mr. Walpole’s *indifference*, were, it seems, the only adequate reasons that could be given why all was returned promiscuously. *These were not* the reasons.



What *he* calls an *insult* was the moderate return of a high spirit to the utmost degree of insolence. As to his *indifference*, in *one* view of his conduct, he was by no means indifferent. He returned all, or he returned a part, from the petulant irritation of a puny soul;—*provoked*, when it should have been *delighted*. His own words contradict him; the expression, that “all was returned *promiscuously*,” proclaims, not his indifference, but his tumultuous resentment. He ought to have been ashamed of *himself*; of his own admiration of Chatterton; if he meant his *literary* indifference. In *that* view, the word could only be the result of an insensible stupidity; or of an absurd, ridiculous, inconsistent, and lying pride. All his life he struggled, (no man more in vain;—I allude to *real* desert) for the highest human glory, intellectual fame, all his life, he affected to despise it, whenever it came into competition with the dirt that inflamed the rapacity of a Pizarro, and an Almagro; whenever it came into competition with the childish trinkets which are presented to courtly minions by kings.

His very notes; his very labour to ascertain the disputed letter, augment *my* doubts: though I still hope that it *did* exist.—He says that he often mentioned it in company; and that he has no doubt that his mention of it “came to Chatterton’s knowledge.” In the circle of *his* acquaintance, he might very safely mention it, though it had been a mere premeditated idea. It is absurd to suppose that any one of *them* would converse with Chatterton: *he* was *poor*; and he had been guilty of a most unpardonable crime in the eye of the fashionable world; he had offended Mr. Walpole.

“If he gave me *that* provocation” (says Mr. Walpole; the provocation of the letter) “it was *true*: if he did *not*, I had no ‘reason to invent it.’” Yes, you *had*; for if you *did* invent it, you thought, and you thought justly, that all they who *ought* to have applauded Chatterton for the letter, would condemn him for it; I mean, all they whose opinions are formed, and determined by unreflecting fashion, and servile imitation; not by reason, and equity; and who allow no *conduct*, no *language* of spirit, and independence, to

the *poor*: and *their* number includes by far the greater part of society: it includes the powerful world, without *one* exception.

Mr. Walpole affected so warmly to admire the poetical powers of Chatterton, that in *one* place, he bestows on them the epithet, *miraculous*. The editor of the *Miscellanies* deeply regrets that by the premature death of their authour, the world was deprived of the works which he might have written, and which would have contributed to the honour of our nation. This assertion, which, indeed is warranted by a conditional moral certainty, Mr. Walpole classes with "*fond*," (or foolish) "*imagination*." Then it follows, from his own acknowledgement, that the highest poetical excellence does *not* contribute to the honour of a nation. But what Chatterton even lived to write, will contribute to the immortal honour of our nation. How low are the objects of a corrupt, and plodding statesman, comparatively with those of a poet! Did Sir Robert Walpole's labours, and arts, and elevation, contribute to the *honour*, or to the *disgrace* of the British nation?

“ I should be more justly reproachable  
 “ for having contributed to cherish an  
 “ impostor, than I am, for having acceler-  
 “ ated his fate. I cannot repeat the words  
 “ without emotions of indignation, on  
 “ my own account, and of compassion,  
 “ on *his*. But I have *promised* to argue  
 “ calmly, and I *will*.”—G. M. April. p.  
 191.—I quote this passage as a compre-  
 hensive specimen of a most iniquitous,  
 and barbarous estimator of human con-  
 duct; of an affected philosopher; of a  
 callous heart, assuming the amiable virtue  
 of compassion; of a preposterous hypo-  
 crite; who while he stabs his victim, sheds  
 over it the tears of Iago.—“ Is it not hard”  
 (says he) “ that a man on whom a forge-  
 “ ry has been tried unsuccessfully, should,  
 “ for that single reason, be held out to  
 “ the world, as the assassin of genius? If  
 “ a banker, to whom a forged note should  
 “ be presented, should refuse to accept it,  
 “ and the ingenious fabricator should  
 “ afterwards fall a victim to his own slight  
 “ of hand; would you accuse the poor  
 “ banker to the publick, and urge that  
 “ his caution had deprived the world of  
 “ some suppositious deeds of settlement



“ that would have deceived the whole  
 “ court of chancery, and deprived some  
 “ great family of its estate ?”—April ; pp.  
 191, 192.—But in other places, the good  
 man relaxes from these hard morals of  
 the usurer ; but, I pray, observe, *not* with-  
 out the previous inconsistency of a feeble  
 understanding, and a guilty heart.—“ Are  
 “ you angry that *I* was not more a dupe  
 “ than *you* ? If I suspected his *forgeries*,  
 “ how did they entitle him to my assist-  
 “ ance ?”—A little after he thus proceeds :  
 “ I do not mean to use the term, *forged*,  
 “ in a *harsh* sense : I speak of Chatter-  
 “ ton’s mintage, as forgeries of poems, in  
 “ ancient language, &c.”—April p. 192.  
 —“ Though I had no doubt of his impo-  
 “ sitions, such a spirit of poetry breathed  
 “ in his *coinage*, as *interested me for him* ;  
 “ nor was it a *grave* crime in a young  
 “ bard to have forged false notes of hand,  
 “ that were to pass current only in the  
 “ PARISH of Parnassus.”—May ; p. 248.—  
 God forbid that I should think of giving a  
 particular answer to *these* passages ! I  
 shall only observe that more miserable  
 stuff was never obtruded on the world for  
 argument. And this ridiculous mode of

arguing principally proceeds from his endeavours, as impotent as they are inhuman, to class the comparatively innocent fictitious old poetry with that very criminal species of forgery which attacks property. *This* was evidently his design, from the terms which he always misapplies to Chatterton's inoffensive imposition. Under *this* most ungenerous, and wretched resource, he endeavoured to shelter the guilt of which he was unavoidably conscious, for having refused a very practicable, moderate, and easy protection, and encouragement, to exalted, but oppressed genius. Yet you see, that, in spite of all this little disingenuous art, *reason* corrects injustice, and barbarity; and asserts her divine empire over the mind. Conscience often intimidates, and confounds those criminals whom she cannot drag to the sentence which they deserve. To apply to Chatterton, and to the beautiful poems which he only published under a feigned name, the terms which express the most obnoxious felonies;—such as, *forgeries, forger, mint, coiner*;—and other similar words of unqualified, and licentious abuse;—was the

moral turpitude of a creature, who was as barbarously unmerciful to the conduct of his neighbour as he was selfishly, and pusillanimously tender to his own. This farrago of inelegance, dullness, and disingenuity, is addressed to the editor of the *Miscellanies*: *that* editor is as basely ungenerous to the young poet's moral character as Mr. Walpole himself: yet he very rationally supposes that if a seasonable patronage had interposed between him, and his bad fortune, it would have saved him from ruin. *This* highly probable opinion, or rather certain conclusion, is treated as a chimerical idea by Walpole, and his flatterers: and indeed by *what other* persons could it have been held in *that* estimation? What impartial, and sensible person can doubt that a very small assistance would have propelled his course, with a most auspicious gale, to the luxuriant harbour, of virtue, and of glory;—who knew “the genial current  
“of his soul;”—his stoical temperance, and his stoical pride; his contempt of the low, prebendal sensuality; and of the pomp, and vanity of the play-things of artificial life;—his contempt of *every* in-

feriour object, when it came into competition with the atchievements of the mind ?

“ Rowley would be a prophet, a fore-  
 “ seer” (says Mr. Walpole) “ if the poems  
 “ were *his* ; yet in any other light, he  
 “ would not be so extraordinary a phæ-  
 “ nomenon as Chatterton ; whom, *though*  
 “ *he was a bad man, as is said, I lament*  
 “ *not having seen.* He might, at that  
 “ time, have been less corrupted, and  
 “ *my poor patronage* might have saved  
 “ him from the abyss into which he plun-  
 “ ged. But alas ! how could I surmise  
 “ that the well-being, and existence of a  
 “ human creature depended on *my swal-*  
 “ *lowing* a legend ; and from an unknown  
 “ person ? Thank God, so far from hav-  
 “ ing any thing to charge myself with on  
 “ Chatterton’s account, it is very hypothe-  
 “ tical to suppose that *I* could have stood  
 “ between *him*, and ruin. It is one of  
 “ those possible events, which we should  
 “ be miserable indeed if imputable to a  
 “ conscience that had not the smallest  
 “ light to direct it ! If I went to Bengal,  
 “ I might perhaps interpose, and save  
 “ the life of some poor Indian, devoted by



“ the fury of a British Nabob : but amiable as such Quixotism would be, we are not to sacrifice every duty to the possibility of realizing one conscientious vision.”—May : p. 249.—Depraved, and sordid a kind of being as human nature *is*, we seldom meet with such a specimen of an unfeeling heart; with such an elaborate, but transparent endeavour to transfer our own baseness to the character of another person;—we seldom meet with an affected humanity of such demure, and hypocritical accomplishment, as that which is presented to us in the *former* part of this quotation; it out-*Blifils* the culprit of the celebrated Fielding. In the *latter* part of the quotation is exhibited such a *monster* of a case;—call it simile, illustration, or more properly, confusion; as is not to be found in the most exceptionable passages of any orator, or poet : it surpasses the most unnatural, and ridiculous extravagance of Blackmore, or of Lee. He talks of an amiable Quixotism : yes; there *is* an amiable Quixotism; to which a Walpole never soared. Don Quixote’s was, in many respects, a fine madness; it was an enthusiast in

compassion; it was an enthusiast in heroick virtue. The mental disorder of *this* apologist is an intermitting moral fever; he is seized with a cold, icy fit, whenever he thinks of the garret in Shore-ditch, or in Brook-Street; the melancholy abodes of a great, and indigent poet: when Berkley-Square, and Strawberry-Hill arise in his little fancy, the more lasting hot fit of self-love succeeds; pleasing in its access: in its decline corroding. Or it is a malignant fever; and of a remarkably contagious nature; infecting many morbid, and effeminate constitutions in high life.

He had the unprincipled cruelty; the mischievous, but puny art; and the verbal absurdity, to tell us, that Chatterton, “as it was said was *a bad man*.”—Let us not forget that he died in his eighteenth year. Fools, Mr. Walpole, may catch your insinuation; for if he had been, in maturity of years, a man, he would have been a more responsible moral agent. *You* might have contributed to prolong his life, in *reality*, with a God-like providence: to prolong it, in *idea*, with *your* invidious view, and expression, was the

action of a *dæmon*. The world is *not* generous ; yet he might have lived to be a man, and a most glorious man, if he had not, in *one* instance, terribly misapplied his epistolary talent. The word, *bad*, as a morally stigmatizing epithet, could only have been applied to *him*, by a dull, undistinguishing, and uncharitable being. There never was a generous, ardent, and great mind, without juvenile imprudences. If cold, compact, and uniform discretion, of a smooth surface ; of a hard, and indissoluble substance ;—if such human flint is good for *any* thing, let the *Walpoles* take it. To be proud, and to strut, in the gay trappings of life ; to see, or to respect no merit, where there is no fortune ; consistently with this arrogant, and impious prejudice, to affect to despise genius in the poor, and unprotected ; while we sicken with a virulent envy at the sight of its splendour ; to pretend to melt with compassion, while our hearts are adamant ; *these* are the infallible characteristicks of a completely, and incorrigibly *bad man*.—" Consider, sir" (says Mr. Walpole) " what would be the condition of the world, what the satisfaction

“ of parents, and what Peruvian mines  
 “ must be possessed by the Mæcenases of  
 “ the times, if every muse-struck lad,  
 “ who is bound to an attorney, every  
 “ clerk,

————born his father's soul to cross,  
 And pen a stanza when he should engross,

“ should have nothing to do but to draw  
 “ a bill, or a couplet, on the patron of  
 “ learning in vogue, and have his fetters  
 “ struck off; and a post assigned to him  
 “ under the government. The duties of  
 “ office, perhaps, would not be too well  
 “ executed by these secretaries of the mu-  
 “ ses; and though Apollo's *kingdom*  
 “ would certainly *come*, king George's  
 “ would not be too well served.”—G. M.

April; p. 192.—Whether this passage is  
 more marked with ungenerous, and un-  
 feeling language; with egregiously false,  
 and impudent sophistry; or with Grub-  
 Street attempts at wit, it would be diffi-  
 cult to determine. I shall here be obliged  
 to dislodge him from two of the holes in  
 which he shrinks from performing a no-  
 ble, and easily practicable species of liber-



ality. To apply the lines of Mr. Pope to Chatterton, is equally stupid, absurd, and indecent. Those lines impeach, they do not absolve his conduct. Every school-boy knows that Mr. Pope had in his eye, when he wrote them, young, pert, ignorant poetasters ; but by no means a *Chatterton*, whom this creature justly pronounces a prodigy, a *miracle* of genius ; and while with an inconsistency of which *he* alone was capable, (arising from the usual conflict betwixt his favourite, and despicable family-pride, and his involuntary, his extorted admiration of mental excellence)—while with *this* inconsistency, he treats him with that indifference, contempt, and with that uncharitable, and inquisitorial spirit, on paper, with which he had treated him before in action, he writes the severest possible satire on his own avarice, and insensibility. He should have been ashamed to recall the image of Mr. Pope to ingenuous memories. He would not bestow a guinea to promote the exertions, and prosperity, of early and unrivalled genius ; Mr. Pope, with a comparative poverty of fortune, was practically generous to a comparative mediocri-

ty of talents ; when it was almost dead to fine fame, and to finer virtue. Yet let me be tender to the memory of the unfortunate Savage ! When the extreme sensibility is powerfully assailed, on the *one* hand, with pleasure, and on the *other*, with *pain* ; what Hercules in virtue is equal to the combat ! Mr. Pope viewed the abilities of the man with esteem, and respect ; he viewed his vices with a christian indulgence ; his distresses, with a christian compassion ; for he had not, like a Walpole, determined *not* to relieve them. Mr. Pope had generously engaged to contribute twenty pounds annually to the support of Savage. When we estimate the very different value of money in the time of Mr. Pope, and in the decline of Mr. Walpole's life, twenty pounds a-year to Savage was about equivalent (my multiplying calculation is moderate) to the annual gratuity of a guinea a-week ; if Mr. Walpole, amongst his whimsical, lavish, and useless expenditures, could have prevailed with his contracted heart to allow that pittance to Chatterton. If he could have arisen to *this* very moderate pitch of beneficence,

it is highly probable (I no more pretend to retrospective certainty than to prophecy) that Chatterton would have, now, been living, and happy ; that he would have been esteemed for the disinterested, and expanded virtues ; and admired for the literary, and poetical powers of his mind ; that he would have been in the plenitude of unrivalled fame ; and consequently, that he would have poured a flood of light on the intellectual galaxy of his country. A tributary ray would have shot down to earth ; it would have shed a grateful, and a pleasing gleam on the tomb of Walpole. When the mind of Johnson was working for several years, and not with inglorious toil, on the Dictionary of the English Language ; the generous protection of a Chesterfield, in the lapse of those years ; to preclude want ; to alleviate toil ; and to inflame ambition, bestowed on him the sum of—*Ten Pounds!* This was more, by ten pounds, than could be obtained from Walpole, by the more striking, and original merit of Chatterton. Yet what a pity it is, that Johnson, for the honour of the highest gifts of heaven, could not have dispensed with the accept-

ance of that charity;—of that charity?—no! of that insult, from an unanimated puppet of polished mechanism! Ye sons of vanity! why will you not rise above your momentary passion? Cæsar panted not more than *you* for distinction; why will you not, then, like *him*, but for better causes, make it durable, and unconfined? Your external power will give you what your internal insignificance denies. From a glittering, childish, expensive, and extravagant vanity, you have only the life of an ephemeris; from an obvious, cheap, and beneficent vanity, you may secure immortality. With a small particle of what you squander on little *human* art; on stone, and colours; and twinkling mimic stars; preserve, and invigorate to proper action; appropriate to your lasting glory, the noblest works of God! Relieve, and animate aspiring genius, and persevering virtue in distress. Be not satisfied to shine in the narrow circle of a court; the painted insects of which, unless you feel a more sensible vanity, will soon perish, like yourselves; and you may sail “along the stream of “time,” with the *Johnsons*, and if a hu-



man comet appears while you live, with the *Chatterton* of your age.

In this letter to the ungenerous editor of Chatterton's Miscellanies, he estimates his power to do good as falsely as he misrepresents other objects.—“ My fortune  
 “ is private, and moderate; my situation  
 “ more private; my interest, none. I  
 “ was neither born to wealth, nor to accu-  
 “ mulate it. I have indulged a taste for  
 “ expensive baubles, with little attention  
 “ to œconomy: it did not become *me* to  
 “ give myself airs of protection; and  
 “ though it might not be generous, I have  
 “ been less fond of the company of au-  
 “ thours than of their works.”—p. 192.—  
 Four assertions, in the former part of this quotation, are gross violations, and because he *published* them, *impudent* violations of truth. He was left in great affluence by his father; he enjoyed many thousand pounds a-year; and when he died, he left more than £100,000. I am writing *within* his bounds. Therefore, notwithstanding the diminished value of money; the luxury of the times; and our enormous crimes in India; allow me to be so

antiquated a man as to insist that Mr. Walpole was immensely rich. His connexions were extensive, and powerful; he might easily have procured a small establishment for his petitioner; which would have produced a pecuniary affluence to a great mind, rich in genius, and of intense application. Let him not talk of his little regard for œconomy; he was avaricious; but even misers will have their expensive, their extravagant whims. And if he could have sublimated his childish taste for those baubles of which he owns that he was enamoured, to an exalted moral taste for acts of generous, diffusive, and judicious benevolence; Chatterton might have been made happy, and completely illustrious, with the hundred-thousandth part of the collective sum which on those baubles he had *idly*, and *selfishly* expended. You must now see his theatrical, and meretricious modesty, when he told us that “it did not become *him* to give himself airs of protection.” —It is, indeed, altogether, a most ignominious letter; in every line of it, conscious guilt breaks its thin covering: it is

fraught with a dastardly fear of the accuser to whom it is addressed; with an affected humility to *him*, and to the publick; who are too often easily deluded gudgeons; when the little pride of wealth, prostrated by cowardice, deprecates their resentment; and seems to reverence their opinion. The epistolary crouching of Walpole I should have compared with the supplications of an ancient gladiator, *populum extremâ exorantis arenâ*; had not the unfortunate Roman Slave been *brave*.

Aspersions have been thrown unjustly, and cruelly : I will never hesitate to retaliate on iniquity; when I have justice on my side. This man, in the course of *one* letter, has been guilty of many forgeries on the sacred bank of truth. To assume virtues of which we are totally destitute; to endeavour to elude the force of well-grounded accusations with the assertions of falsehood, and with the candour of timidity; to be industrious to deceive the publick into a belief of that humanity, which, as we never practised, we never felt;—*these* impostures; *these*

forgeries are far more criminal than the ingenious, and splendid fiction, which formed an imaginary, but highly poetical priest of the fifteenth century.



## LECTURE XVI.

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### CHATTERTON.

IF Mr. Walpole sincerely deemed his fortune moderate, and his life private, I should have wished to know what he really thought of the situations, and pleasures, of many *worthy* persons, who were in circumstances infinitely more circumscribed than his own. He must have concluded that the predominate description of the life of a *very* private gentleman was imprisonment, and distress; and that *every particle of enjoyment was annihilated*, to the *poor*. Indeed, with an infatuation which often seems to intoxicate the *great*, he might suppose that people in the lower classes of society, were, by nature, differently constituted

from himself; and consequently that he, and they would be affected by external impressions, with different modifications of pain, and pleasure. If *that* was his idea, I should then have wished to know what would have been, in *his* opinion, *not* a moderate fortune; but a fortune affluent, and large enough to support the dignity of titled *worth*; of *true* nobility;—or to varnish; to redeem; to warrant the infamy of *that* peerage, with which a minister of iniquity was rewarded who made it his principal study;—nay, his\* boasted art, *to corrupt the vitals of the British constitution*.

He says that “he was less fond of the “company of authours than of their “works.”—And he is frank enough almost to acknowledge that the preference “was not generous.”—If, indeed, he had been fond of the society of men of polite,

\* “A celebrated minister had a book of rates of the probity “of each member of parliament; and openly boasted of it, to “the *disgrace of the English*.”—Rayal. History of the European settlements in the East and West Indies.

A free choice of books is, at present, not in my power; therefore I am obliged to quote this passage from Justamond’s affected, and barbarous translation.

and accomplished learning, and of distinguished talents, he would so far have departed from his real character: for as he merely *pretended* to be an authour, himself, with all his inordinate self-love, he must have felt himself uneasy, and embarrassed, while he was in the company of eminent, and illustrious authours: the reflected gleams of the paternal coronet; the weighty gifts of the Peruvian god, would give him little confidence, and animation, when they were opposed to the intellectual treasures of Apollo; to the better gold which *his* influence matures; to his powerful, and celestial inspiration. For consistently with the observation of Horace, if you should attempt to overwhelm nature with a mountain of gold, she will spring up; shove the mountain off; and assert her empire.

Before I quit my particular attention to Mr. Walpole, I request you to judge from an example or two (indeed all his defence is a series of such examples) how far he deserves the rich literary incense which was offered to him by the editor of the Gentleman's Magazine;—how far he deserves the character of an *elegant, mas-*

*terly, admirable writer.* You know the old and trite, but sensible adage; *expede, Herculem; ex ungue, leonem.*

Chatterton informed him, in his first letter, that “the possessour of the old “poetry could furnish him with accounts “of a series of great painters that had “flourished at Bristol.”—“I was not “likely” (says he) “to SWALLOW a succession of great painters at Bristol.”—p. 247. It is certain that in *this* expression the delicacy of the antiquary is greater than that of the writer. But “the creature is at his dirty work *again.*” In one of his compassionate fits, he thus expresses his grief, and regret.—“Alas! “how could *I* surmise that the well-being “and existence of a human creature depended on my SWALLOWING a legend!” P. 249.

The writer of this tedious, and unsatisfactory letter makes many impotent efforts at various kinds of eloquence. Permit me to give you a specimen of his humour. In expostulating with the editor of the Miscellanies, yet only for just reproaches, after having accused him of treating his rejection of Chatterton’s



request with an unwarrantable severity, he adds, with an attick spirit peculiar to himself;—"and lest that rejection should  
 "want *a name*, you have *baptized* it, neglect, and contempt.

Here, as in a thousand other instances, we see verified Horace's invincibility of nature. No art can eradicate *her* essential deformities: and thanks be to heaven, it sometimes happens, that no sublunary evils can suppress her beauties. The best education that the world could afford; conversation with the most polished, with the most highly cultivated society, a personal knowledge of the most interesting countries of Europe; the instructive, and animating display of the fine arts; the daily impression of elegant, and splendid objects;—all *these* capital advantages could not excite, in the breast of Mr. Walpole, their corresponding forms; they could not subdue the natural coarseness, and vulgarity of his mind. If I am told that the short examples which I have cited, are trifling, and insignificant, I reply, that in literary composition, *nothing* is trifling, or insignificant. Every particle of the whole, shows, to a discerning

judge of that object, the vigorous, or the feeble mind; the elegant, or the barbarous taste of the writer. And I likewise reply, that the whole strain of the writings of the late Lord Orford, as well as of this letter, is dull; unclassical; totally inelegant. But in this contemptible defence, on which I have been animadverting with a warrantable freedom, more sacred qualities, his moral characteristicks, are evidently obnoxious to the censure of the most liberal observer. Agreeably to my preceding remarks, it is far from being honourably distinguished by those concise, and simple assertions, with which conscious integrity supports its cause: on the contrary, it betrays a mind trembling under the sense of guilt, and disingenuity; and therefore, by its minute, reiterated protestations, painfully solicitous to be believed.

I have dwelt rather long on Mr. Walpole's apology for his conduct to Chaterton. My motives were good; and if I have been severe, I thought that severity was my duty. It has been my wish, as I have already observed, to blend instructive, and useful views in morality,

with literary entertainment. *This* most important part of my plan it was impossible to effect; *these* improving views I could not present to you, in their full expansion, and in their vivid colours; if I had suffered my mind to harbour a courtly, feudal, immoral respect of persons;—if I had contracted my views; if I had dimmed their objects, with a reserve, and timidity of sentiment, and language; with a hand fearful of the malignity of criticism, and of the frowns of the great. I have endeavoured to lay before you, openly, and completely, some striking topicks in the ethical code, which may have salutary ends; they may refresh the memory; they may warm the heart; they may, at momentous junctures, animate, and exalt the conduct. We cannot, too often for our generous practice, calmly recollect, and feelingly consider, how easily the fortunate acquire *any* kind of high reputation; how frequently the most virtuous, and glorious desert, is chilled by their neglect, or harassed by their malevolence; with what alacrity and industry their dispositions are gratified by the sycophants that surround

them ; the adulators of their caprice ; the instruments of their passions ; the ministering elements to the gods of this lower globe ; which, at *their* nod, by congealing the moral atmosphere ; or by breathing into it a malignant agitation, destroy some fine human fabrick of reason, and fancy ; trample on its ashes, and enjoy the ruin.

There are, indeed, several circumstances uncommon ; I hope, unexampled, in the short, but eventful history of this extraordinary young man. When we consider his abilities ; his productions, and his fate ; it seems rather surprising, that, soon after his death, more attention was not payed to his memory ; and that he was not more the subject of general conversation. It must be owned that his works excited some warm, and on *one* side of the question, very ridiculous critical conflicts ; but the literary world, *extensively*, have never been so much interested as might have been expected, in so rare a phænomenon. To solve what at first sight, may appear enigmatical, an *Ædipus* is not required. I am sorry that the solution will make *one* memorable



article more, in the melancholy history of human nature. Chatterton, though splendid by genius, was poor, obscure, and depressed in station. His application to Mr. Walpole; the returns to that application; and his untimely death, had made that person, with great justice, an object of humane, and indignant censure. Yet on such an occasion, the process of the moral chymistry ultimately acts with a result quite contrary to that of the physical: the dross is sublimated; the ethereal spirit is precipitated. Whether this view of the subject is cynical, or true, let the literary conduct of Mr. Tyrwhitt determine. What prejudice, and meanness influenced, and directed the remarks, and the censures, of *this* learned, and sensible critick, and commentator, cannot, as I should suppose, be reasonably disputed. Chatterton was long, and repeatedly, the object of *his* inquiries, and observations. His moral character he persecutes with an undistinguishing barbarity; on his natural endowments; on his acquirements of knowledge, both, unequalled, at *his* tender years, and with *his* opportunities, he bestows not a single

particle of the praise which they deserved. A concurrence of singular circumstances were evidently the causes of a singular obduracy: this monstrous retention of the voice of nature; this obstinate stagnation of common sentiments; however constitutional they may have been to the man, were more indissolubly fixed by the polar frost of Walpole. All the annals of literature, in all the world, cannot produce an instance of such a PROFLIGATE complaisance. To a servile obsequiousness to wealth, and title; to the unavailing pleadings of youthful genius, in unutterable distress; to the most unmerciful insults on its memory;—I apply *this* epithet, *justly*, which was applied with a ruthless *injustice* to Chatterton's juvenile sensibility; the momentary irregularities of which brought little, or no impeachment on his heart.

“ I am exerting my best endeavours to  
 “ vindicate thy memory, thou transcend-  
 “ ently great, but ill-fated youth! I have  
 “ repeatedly felt a solemn impulse to this  
 “ generous though invidious task; and  
 “ I trust that my sentiments have been  
 “ in unison with that impulse. I have

“ been thy ardent advocate ; yet not with  
 “ higher praise than was warranted by  
 “ thy desert ; “ without partiality, and  
 “ without hypocrisy.” I could not have  
 “ done justice to thee, unless I had dis-  
 “ dained all temporizing reserve; unless  
 “ I had felt a warmth, in *some* degree,  
 “ congenial with thy own. *My warmth*  
 “ was a warm admiration of a mind su-  
 “ perior to its fate; a warm compassion  
 “ for its misfortunes; a warm love of  
 “ noble, and amiable virtue; and a  
 “ warm detestation of puritanical tyrants,  
 “ and voluntary slaves. To this freedom,  
 “ and to this ardour, my style must have  
 “ been analogous, by the imperious ne-  
 “ cessity of nature. All this warmth  
 “ may be pronounced malignity by malign-  
 “ ant criticks ; but to *their* censure I  
 “ have been long habituated; and to  
 “ more liberal criticks I hope that I shall  
 “ not appeal in vain.—*Thou transcend-*  
 “ *ently great, but ill-fated youth!*—The  
 “ animating, the reprehensory gleams of  
 “ thy much-injured ghost, have often  
 “ pierced the gloom of this Boeotian at-  
 “ mosphere; they have roused, and sti-  
 “ mulated my languishing faculties; they

“ have, in my old age, invigorated my  
 “ reason; illumined, and enriched my  
 “ fancy;—they have renovated my mind,  
 “ and given it a youthful play. Yet to  
 “ certain prejudices, the very root on  
 “ which they should soon decay, is apt to  
 “ give them a stabiliment, and duration.  
 “ Under *their* deadly night-shade, we  
 “ may both be consigned to a *temporary*  
 “ sepulture: shall we presume to be ex-  
 “ empted from the destiny of some of our  
 “ glorious ancestors? But as there is a  
 “ final resurrection, and judgement for  
 “ the *man*, there is an intermediate resur-  
 “ rection, and judgement, for his *produc-*  
 “ *tions*. Let us wait for the reforming  
 “ power of time; for *his* adjusting equity.  
 “ Let us wait for the prevailing voice of  
 “ honest fame; for the oracular decision  
 “ of posterity.”

Let us now see to what enormous criminality the artful, and mischievous forgeries; the profligate impostures of Chatterton amount. It is very possible;—it is not improbable, that he had intended, at some future time, to make the full discovery, which was retarded, and obstructed, by the dullness, and rubbish of



criticism. Ardent ambition, especially at the commencement of its career, is tremulous for its fortune, though it is bold in its promotion. It might have been in his plan, to wait for the proclamation of fame in his favour; before he stepped forth, and payed his personal homage to the goddess. The late excellent Mr. Burke (my mind, while I mention his name, is divided between my admiration of his talents, and my reverence of his virtues) —the late Mr. Burke published an essay (which you may find in the fugitive pieces) entitled, “ A Vindication of the Natural “ Rights of Society ;” in which he deliberately, and happily imitated the seducing sophistry, and the magnificent declamation of Lord Bolingbroke. It passed, for some time, over England, agreeably to the intention of the writer, for the genuine production of that celebrated nobleman. Mr. Burke, when he thought it proper, revealed the secret. In the interim, he, undoubtedly, carefully kept it, and guarded it in conversation. Truth is never to be violated, when the violation does the least injury; when it indicates a mean heart. But when people are im-

placable against a falsehood which, at least, does no harm ; I should be apt to doubt their own habitual moral veracity ; I should be apt to suspect their *assumption* of a virtue. Literary fiction, when it is formed for our innocent, for our improving entertainment ; when it strengthens, and refines the moral sense ; or when it recreates, without corrupting, the imagination ; when by its artful machinery, and interesting characters, it deceives us into a tender sympathy with human distress ; into an ardent throb for heroick virtue ; when we are transported to Thebes, or to Athens ; to the Danube ; or the Ganges, at the will of the charming, and powerful magician ; all *this* elegant ingenuity ; all *these speciosa miracula* are *falsehood*, if you please, in the *rigid* sense of the word ; yet they are not only allowable, but worthy of encomium. If the writer even substitutes for *himself* an *imaginary* person ; and if this fiction does no injury to the community, nor to any individual ; is it not the utmost iniquity ; is it not the utmost barbarity, to confound *his* disposition, with that of the artful, and bold invader of property ;

with that of the rapacious culprit who breaks the sacred ties of society? Now, the pamphlet of Mr. Burke, to which I have referred, was as much a forgery, and imposture, as the Rowley of Chatterton. But Mr. Burke, both in theory, and in practice, insisted on the substance, not on the shadows of virtue. *His* mind came pregnant with manly, and expanded ideas, from the school of Socrates, and from the genuine school of Christ: it was *not* contracted, and shrivelled with hypocritical scruples, because it was actuated; because it was impelled, with all its irresistible energy, by a most humane, enlarged, and generous morality; displayed, on every suitable occasion, in corresponding deeds.

At Strawberry-Hill, a mountain which has been delivered of many complete mice, and of many unreducible monsters; the Honourable Horace Walpole; the intolerant censor of juvenile dissipation; the superstitious idolater of literal, and inexorable truth; printed, many years ago, a dubious creature of *his* brain; half-novel, and half-romance. It was entitled, “The Castle of Otranto.” This

nondescript of a confused fancy, would be very characteristically described, and represented,—

Humano capiti cervicem pictor equipam  
Jungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas,  
Undique collatis membris ; aut turpiter atrum  
Desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne.—

Horace. Art Poetick.

In the title-page of his book, he announced to the world, as “ a translation from “ the Italian, by Andrew Marshal.” Now I insist that this is as absolute a literary *forgery*, or *imposture* (if we *must* give *heavy* names to *light* offences) as any one that Chatterton committed. I have given a probable, and important reason why *he* might chuse to appear in publick in the habit of the fifteenth century. But his enemy, and accuser seems to have thrown out *his* decoy, in the wantonness of literary sport. Or, I will allow him humility in *one* instance of his life ; I shall suppose that he had an apprehensive anxiety for the fortune of his performance (though it was a descendent of nobility) as it was, certainly, at least, of an exotick form ; and that he thought



it necessary previously to make it interesting by some popular artifice. He knew that we were infatuated with emasculated importations from Italy ; and on *this* foundation it must be owned that he anticipated the success of his work by a very *taking* title. But, indeed it is very probable that this imposture partly proceeded from the little creature's affected contempt of the literary character ; of which a Frederick, an Alfred, the Antonines, and Cæsar were proud, to their immortal honour.

In the language, then, of a Tyrwhitt, or a Milles ; in the language of a critical Draco ; the authour of the *Castle of Otranto*, was, in his title-page, indisputably guilty of a forgery, or imposture. It was indeed, a double imposition ; contrived to deceive the publick, not only in the title-page, but through the whole book ; of which it had given us false, and imaginary persons, as the authour, and the translator. As far as Chatterton's motives for the deceit were more cogent than Walpole's, the latter showed, in *his* deceit, a more fraudulent disposition. Should it be urged that Mr. Walpole's

fraud was, comparatively, produced by a momentary act of the mind; and that Chatterton's was the effect of a deliberate plan; of a system of a long continuance of deceit; I reply, that the genius; the entertainment; the poetical honours that we acquired by the *real* Rowley, were worth a thousand Castles of Otranto; or to distinguish with more propriety, that *he* amply redeemed the popularity which, for a while, was lavished on that delirious rhapsody, by many readers, in an enlightened nation. If I do not reason justly, and closely, on my present subject, it is my error, not my intention. I set the strong motives for the protracted, against the weak motives for the short delusion: so far I think that the moral account (as hypocritical superstition has made it a *rigid* account) is accurately balanced. I then compare the result of each imposture; the literary glory of the *one* with the literary ignominy of the *other*; the high pleasure of sentiment, and imagination, which was afforded by the *one*, with the load, and the lassitude of mind, with which unprejudiced, and sensible readers were oppressed by the *other*. When to

*these* considerations I add the importunate, and formidable wants; the tender, and unexperienced years of the young poet; and the most affluent, and flattering circumstances; the hoary age, hackneyed in the ways of the world, of the moral *Page* who *judged* him;—I appeal, *not* to a Cowley, nor to a Williams, of the *softer sex*; whose compassion, and sympathy; whose generous tribute to the memory of Chatterton almost atoned for the barbarity of *ours*; nor do I appeal to a Hayley; who, in elegant, and elegiack numbers, has, to that memory been equally generous; nor to a humane, and liberal Croft; who, in the conduct of the true gentleman, and the christian, was almost emancipated from the priest:—no; I now call on a Tyrwhitt and a Bryant; if *they* can, for awhile, forget their gothick homage to power, and obey the dictates of conscience; (hear me ye spirits of Walpole, and of Milles!) I call on *these* men to tell me, who was guilty of the more criminal forgery, and imposture? I flatter myself that my present sentiments have the honour to be revibrated by the feeling souls of my audience;

who *yet* deplore all the hard fate of Chatterton; and kindly fancy themselves equally indebted to his genius, and to his poverty. For my own part, I have always (unfortunately, shall I say, or by a peculiarity for which I ought to be grateful to nature, and to its God!) I have always estimated virtue, and vice, according to the justest view that I could take of their causes, and effects; and of the general conduct of the human agents, whom they influenced, and controuled; without any regard to the merely accidental, and morally *foreign* objects, of particular circumstances, and situations; without any desertion from the manly defence of my cause, to a servile respect of persons; without any regard to the smiles, or to the frowns of fortune. The reverse of this habit; a mean flexibility to that pressure which too much domineers over the world; an estimate of worth, and demerit, agreeable to the spurious, and perishable modifications of man; not to the genuine, and adamantine substance of truth;—*this* convenient habit I have always left, and I shall ever leave, to those of the *laity*, with whom a *coronet*; and



to those of the *church*, with whom a *mitre*, is the supreme good.

The strongest charge of imposture against this honourable gentleman, and right honourable lord still remains. I shall now produce a bold example of his progress, and improvement in forgery. When we consider the timidity of the man, we must give some credit to the hardness of the adventurer. I proceed, by a prominence in fact. A climax is never to be despised, either in literary composition, or in moral censure.

When the illustrious Rousseau sought an asylum in England from political, and priestly persecution, this imp of envy, and malignity, instead of soothing, derided his misfortunes. He played off one of his contemptible, yet mischievous machinations, against him. He had the presumption to assume the person of the king of Prussia; who was an elegant, and for a king, a great writer: especially when we compare him with his mimick, Walpole. He wrote a letter, in the name of that monarch, to Rousseau, in which he exhausted all his puny efforts to ridicule, and mortify *the immortal citizen of*

*Geneva.* The literary world must remember that at *that* time, there was an unfortunate dispute between him, and David Hume. The spurious letter was industriously calculated to inflame the dispute; and it actually produced that unhappy effect. Could any fair animadversions demonstrate the inhumanity, and turpitude of Walpole's heart, more forcibly than the simple recital of *these* facts? And yet no man was ever more apt than *he*, to arraign the hearts, and intentions of *others*. This letter, without the exaggerating crimination of poor Chatterton's enemies, whether we consider its origin, or its consequences, may be pronounced by candour itself, *an infamous forgery*. It assumed the character of a sovereign; it insulted exquisite sensibility, in distress; and it widened the disunion of two respectable, amiable, and admirable friends. Mr. Walpole, and Mr. Tyrwhitt; the disciples of a cautious, and delicate morality, have observed how apt the human mind is to grow bolder in vice; to advance from a less to a greater degree of iniquity; from forging poems, to forging bank-notes. With my best attention

to this moral scale, I cannot but think that he who forges a letter from a living person, with a most malicious design, hath superseded all the other dangerous habits of literary imposition; and anticipates the gallows (if he is a *needy* person) with a more diabolical improvement than any *poetical* impostor.

Rousseau's return to this petty, but base insolence, is rather entertaining. He advertised the honourable forger in the publick papers, with this preamble;—"whereas *one* Horace Walpole, &c." It is certain that the monosyllable *one*, was never more properly applied: for in the *sacred* human discrimination; in the distinctions of men, as they have been appointed by *God*, and nature; Walpole was to Rousseau, what\* *one Burnet* was to *Prior*;—what *one Welwood* was to *Milton*.

\* Whitlocke, in his memoirs, distinguishes Milton, the greatest of all poets, by mentioning "*one* Milton; a blind man."

Bishop Burnet, too, a phlegmatick, and vulgar historian; the most unchristian, and base traducer of the virtuous morals of Dryden, introduces Prior into his coarse, and rude page; that elegant, and facetious poet; that *ingenium felix, et versatile*, with the same contemptuous monosyllable; "*one* Prior."

Though the common, and most important dictates of morality are obvious even to untutored minds, moral cases *may* arise, in which men of good conscience may differ in their ethical judgement ; in their estimation of a particular conduct. If there was any guilt in the poetical deceptions of Chatterton, they were, in *my* sincere, and humble opinion, culpable, *in the lowest degree* ; and consequently, far from deserving the ignominious appellations with which they were branded by antichristian intolerance. *His* sentiments on this object most probably coincided with mine ; therefore as *his* heart could not accuse him while he framed those beautiful fictions, they cannot reasonably be produced among the evidences of his *enormous* profligacy. But Mr. Walpole could not plead this innocence : without Chatterton's inducements to impose upon the publick, *he* was deep, and malignant in the crime of literary forgery ; yet at the very *idea* of that crime *his* conscientious delicacy shuddered : *that* crime he reprobated in terms of the severest censure ; therefore his own memory must bear all the load of guilt with



which *he*, and his unprincipled flatterers were industrious to load that of *another*.

Though, I thank God, my mind has not been dragged through a Walpolian farrago of five huge quarto volumes, yet I am well enough acquainted both with his disposition, and his writings, to observe, with an accurate veracity, that his pen was often employed, through a long life, to poison the moral, and literary fame of the greatest men. Cervantes; Fielding; Addison; Swift; Johnson; and many more immortal names; nay, the epick majesty of *Virgil* himself, *he* hath profaned with his impertinent censure, and with his insolent contempt. This little *fretful porcupine* hath darted its *quills* against many fine Arabian coursers; against many lions, and elephants, in the forest of Minerva.

The proportion of the good, or bad effects of human conduct essentially constitutes, and characterizes it, as virtue, or vice, in its nature, and in its degree. The deceptions of Chatterton did not mislead us, in the history of the world, like the fables of Psalmanazar; they did not wound the fame of *the greatest of*

*poets*; nor, consequently, injure the poetical glory of our celebrated island, like the assassinating impostures of *Lauder*; they encroached on no property; they injured no man; at the worst, to give the highest poetical honours to an imaginary being;—to write verses for the *fifteenth*, which, in strength, and harmony, adorn the *eighteenth* century;—fictions, which could only have been doubtful to doting antiquarians, by whom, professionally, they should have been most easily discovered;—at the worst, *these* impositions are surely venial, at the tribunal of candour, and liberality. But two sorts of men were greatly obliged to the authour of these deceptions; vigorous, and elegant minds, who delight in fine poetry; and critical, and scholastick minds, who delight in quibbles; whom the *lana caprina* often engages in warm, and pertinacious disputes; and whose most heart-felt triumph is the discovery of a *wrong*, and the restoration, and establishment of a *right* word. When to these apologies (which, I hope, have the force of substantial truth) we add his very immature age, and that probably, if he

had lived, he would have revealed the whole secret ; I trust that I need make no farther apologies to the judges whom I wish to convince, and please. The memory of Chatterton will be severely treated only by those who are insensible to the benevolence of virtue, and to the impressions of taste ; or by the hypocrites who are eager to accuse *others*, because they are conscious of great misconduct in *themselves*. The compassion, and the praise of this illustrious, and unfortunate youth, will descend, from good, and refined souls, to the latest British posterity ; and if such characters make any exceptions to their praise, the exceptions will be moderate, and tender ; and whenever they are made, they will be soon effaced by the splendid remembrance of his genius. The specks of moral obliquity will be lost in the blaze of mental excellence.

It is as *painful* to me as it may appear *invidious*, frequently to remark our indulgent, or severe estimate of human conduct, in proportion as the persons on whose conduct we animadvert, are more, or less favoured by fortune. But if a partial, and prejudiced world will not do

justice to the unfortunate, in *fact* ; it may be of *some* service to the cause of virtue ; it may, in *some* degree, check licentious calumny, to endeavour to establish, or promote social, and moral justice, in *theory*. They who cherish in their minds, iniquitous, and oppressive sentiments, deserve publick reprehension, and disgust ; not they by whom those sentiments are openly censured, and exposed. I suppose that none who hear me will doubt, that if the dreadfully obnoxious forgeries of Chatterton had been fabricated by a prosperous, and affluent person ; by a young man in high life ;—by the son of a lord ; they would have escaped *his* red-hot ordeal of moral condemnation. Nay, the imposition would have received the tribute of exaggerated praise : (stern crimination, indeed, would have been uncharitably, and absurdly applied ;)—the encomium of a masterly ingenuity in juvenile years ; of a complete victory, and triumph over Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton, would have been lavished on this offspring of noble intellect ; on this heir apparent to immortal glory. Instead of our generous, and indignant re-



sentment, at the opprobrious terms of Mr. Tyrwhitt, we should have been lulled with his incense of compliment, and adulation. Mr. Bryant would not have spurned the poor, and abject; he would have acknowledged the astonishing, the wonderful boy; not without the pedantick hyperbole of academical homage; and the sagacious, and eloquent Dean Milles, while *he* adorned the brows of young, and aspiring nobility, with a *poetical*, would have prepared for himself an *episcopal* crown.

Consistently with that particular, and unreserved attention which I have hitherto shown to social, moral, and poetical justice, Dr. Gregory must contribute to enlarge these Lectures. To the youth, whose too short, and unhappy life he writes, he is, in many places, fair, and liberal; and in many, partial against him, and ungenerous. I have no doubt that he would have been more consistently benevolent, if *his* sentiments, like those of *others*, had not been tainted with the Walpolian influence. I do not presume to say that he was warped, in his narrative, by any kind of intercourse with Mr. Wal-

pole; I only mean, that prejudices, in favour of the powerful, against the weak, insensibly work, and prevail, even in elevated minds (though they come not into immediate contact with their idols) with a seducing, and fascinating magnetism, or magick, in social, and moral life. So insidiously operative is this fascination, that the person who is under its dominion, is frequently insensible of its ignoble sway. So far there is an apology for his deviation from independence. If Dr. Gregory had not been seduced in this manner, he never could have paid such unmerited compliments to Mr. Walpole; he never could have been so cold in the cause of Chatterton; of humanity, and of genius. Let us not presume strongly to recommend the equal, and beneficent spirit of christian freedom; unless we give it life, and action, in *ourselves*; unless we *practically* prove its beauty.

One great error, and misfortune pervades his book: the *man* is overpowered (by no means by the *christian*, for he exalts the man) by the *ecclesiastick*. We pronounce on human conduct from the talmud of our rabbis, when we should

have formed our moral judgement from the unadulterated, unerring, and benign code of the Gospel. It was absurd to be severely censorious on a boy, for his ethical theory ; for his theological scepticism ; or to suppose that free, and excursive inquiries, and decisions of the mind, with its best judgement, will always materially affect its practice. Alas ! we have innumerable instances of far more vice than can be imputed to Chatterton's character (which, indeed, was nobly virtuous, on the whole) among those who pretend to be believers ; among those who really *are* believers in christianity. And the dreadful catastrophe of suicide is not peculiar to persons of profligate manners ; it has often been committed by men, whose tenour of life, before the fatal stroke, has not only been irreproachable, but eminently virtuous. This incontrovertible truth should make lawgivers more tender of their stakes, and priests of their anathemas. The stakes, indeed, are seldom driven ; moderation, and contentment preserve, in general, the lower orders of society from despair. But perjured juries, in this deplorable

case, almost always decide with a profligate complaisance, or barbarity. The sentence of the possession of reason condemns persons of low stations; the possession of a faculty, when they seemed to be least under its direction; and when the others are acquitted of criminality, from the supposed impossibility that *they* possessed it! Reason is denied to the rich, that they may have honourable obsequies; it is allowed to the poor, that their remains may be consigned to infamy. Can we wonder at the partiality, and at the insolence to conditions which prevail in life? Can we fondly hope that they will ever be reformed?—No; death itself cannot subdue them: they defy the admonition, and the interdict of the most awful object of religion; they worship their golden idol—they trample on their unfortunate victim, even in the grave!

Dr. Gregory's reasoning in favour of Mr. Walpole is more uncommon than conclusive. He cannot see how Chatterton could form any well-grounded expectations of assistance from Mr. Walpole; as the statesmen of this country had, in general, neglected genius, which



they certainly ought attentively to have protected :—and as it had been the common fate of genius to live, and die in distress ; and to have its distresses lamented when it was no longer in the power of *this* world to relieve them. This flimsy, and unfeeling logick demands but a short answer. It amounts to *these* positions ;—that where there is much publick misconduct, it is not the duty of any individual, when it is in his power, to counteract it. —That when the great majority of men are bad, it is not the duty of any particular man to be *good* ;—and that as poets have generally been undervalued, neglected, and poor, it is absurd in them to think of improving their fate: they ought to submit to it with all christian resignation, and humility : a peculiar, and contrasted kind of heroism is required of *them* ; they must almost miraculously effect a separation of the component parts of man, before their natural dissolution ; their *souls* must soar to heaven, while their *bodies* sink under indigence, and oppression.

Persons of a virtuous delicacy might blush to read the following strain of rea-

soning from a clergyman; from a professed disciple of the benevolent, and humble Jesus.—“It can scarcely be  
 “deemed an instance of *extraordinary*  
 “illiberality that a private man, though  
 “a man of fortune, should be inattentive  
 “to the petition of a perfect stranger;  
 “a young man whose birth, or education  
 “entitled him to no high pretensions;  
 “and who had only conceived an un-  
 “reasonable dislike to a profession both  
 “lucrative, and respectable.”—Gregory;  
 p. 54.—To possess a large fortune; to  
 pretend to a taste, and love of literature;  
 and yet to refuse the petition of a poor,  
 and unprotected youth; to whose genius  
 he gave the highest admiration;—to re-  
 fuse him the interest that might with ease  
 have procured him a very moderate esta-  
 blishment in life;—or to withhold from  
 him the small annual encouragement  
 which would have saved him; which  
 would have matured his greatness, and  
 made him happy;—and which this obdu-  
 racy expended on one of its vassals in  
 livery; on one of the pageants of its little  
 pride, and vanity;—to be *thus* powerful,  
 and *thus* unfeeling, is certainly an in-

stance of illiberality; and insensible as the fortunate often *are* to all inconveniences but their own, I hope that it is an instance of *extraordinary* illiberality. When I come to “ the petition of a perfect “ stranger; a young man whose birth, or “ education entitled him to no high pre- “ tensions; ”—I feel an honest, and a warrantable indignation which I do not wish to suppress. The disadvantages of his birth, and education, were the very circumstances, which, in the most obvious, and palpable morality, enforced his *natural* pretensions; the highest, and most sacred of all pretensions; the beautiful, and sublime endowments of his mind. These very circumstances recommended these pretensions to a particular attention; to an effectual support. While you mention the birth, and education of Chatterton in a contemptuous manner, you are in perfect agreement with the gothick, and insolent creed of the world; but you apostatize from the doctrine; from the example; and from the sublunary fate of *Jesus Christ*. The divine strain of *his* precepts is endeared to humanity by inculcating respect for the

poor, and a compassionate relief of their miseries. *He* was not a *modern* priest ; as he taught, he lived ; he was continually healing the infirmities, and supplying the wants of the poor ; he chose them for his companions ; for his favourites ; for his bosom-friends. And Dr. Gregory, be pleased to recollect, that the birth, and temporal accommodations of Jesus Christ were inferiour even to those of Thomas Chatterton. *His* circumstances, and situation, sir, in *your* estimate of human conduct, should have aggravated, not extenuated the guilt of Walpole. As to his “ unreasonable dislike,” as you are pleased to term it, “ of a profession both “ lucrative, and respectable,” it is so miserable in sophistry, and so insulting to genius, that I disdain to answer it. What generous, and sympathizing soul, alive to the beauties, and to the pathos of poetry, will not *yet* lament, that the hand which could make its paper glow with the ardent emanations of mind, was obliged mechanically to freeze three hundred and seventy four sheets with the icicles of law ? Who, but a Walpole would not have emancipated him from his bon-



dage? who, but a Gregory, would have *condemned* him to it? I know, good Doctor, that you thought Chatterton a heretick: but I could not have imagined that, in the eighteenth century, we had *one* inquisitor, who would have dared even to approve of one *auto da fe*, in *this* country.

You say (p. 56.) that “Mr. Walpole “was certainly under no obligation of “patronizing Chatterton.”—He was not under the least obligation to patronize him, according to the rules of the court of King’s Bench; nor even of the court of Chancery. But in the court of *Almighty God*, which I almost tremble to name after the others, he was under accumulated obligations to patronize him. According to the rules of *that* court, we are not only to accept every fair occasion of assisting, and befriending our fellow-creature, but we are *industriously to inquire* for such occasions. And in conferring our good offices, we are to imitate the *Divine* fountain of mercy; we are not to be “extreme to mark what is done “amiss;” but we are carefully to look within *ourselves*; and hence we are to

learn to be charitable, and generous to *others*. Mr. Walpole was under no obligation to patronize Chatterton ! How can *you* say *that*, and afterwards preach, and inculcate the beneficent doctrine of your celestial master ; who made it the business of his life, to evince, and exemplify our universal obligation to do all possible good to all men ;—who “ went about doing good ? ”—For heaven’s sake, retain, and support your *christian*, and leave your *jewish* tenets to the scribes, and pharisees of Chatterton ;—to the *Lamberts* of the age.

You say (p. 55.)—“ considering things “ as they *are*, and not as they *ought* to “ be, *it was a degree of unusual condescension, to take any notice whatever of “ the application ; &c.* ”—You are a very wary ambidexter ; a great adept in the art of trimming between that humane morality which you cannot but *love*, and that arrogance to which a worse disposition obliges you to *bow*. For my own part, when important truth is in question, I always take a decided ; I am sure that I take a *sincere* ; and I hope that I take the *right* part. No man is more

thoroughly convinced than *I* am, of the enormous, and overbearing self-esteem by which human nature is actuated, when the favours of fortune are not under the guidance (as they seldom *are*) of reason, reflexion, and religion. Yet I must do the presumptuous, and fortunate the justice to be assured, that most of them who were men of letters, would have treated Chatterton's application with more politeness, attention, and generosity, than it received from Mr. Walpole. So far was *he* from being entitled, on that occasion, to the merit of *unusual condescension*. Indeed, it is an equal absurdity in idea, and in language, to apply condescension, in *any* degree, to a behaviour which began with hypocrisy, and ended with insolence.

You say (p. 56.) “to ascribe to Mr. Walpole's neglect, (if it even can merit so harsh an appellation) the dreadful catastrophe which happened at the distance of nearly two years, would be the highest degree of injustice, and absurdity.”—I have given to this neglect *harsher*, because they were the *proper*, and *merited* appellations. Here is one

of the pliant softenings ; one of the repelling perfumes, which are, every day, offered at the shrine of rank, and affluence. Without any absurdity, sir, we may assert that Mr. Walpole's treatment of this very excellent, and susceptible youth, was *one* cause of his tragical death. He is a poor reasoner, and philosopher, whose views of human actions, and of human fate, are not more extensive than the causes, and effects of the moment. Great, and decisive effects, both in the physical, and moral world, are as often produced by the concatenation of a thousand causes, as by *one* detached, and immediate cause. From the parental formation of the tender mind frequently flow the whole tenour, and complexion of a long human life. By a parity, and fair analogy of reasoning, *one* deplorable act may be committed, which would *not* have been committed if *one* kind, and provident preventive had been applied, not only two, but twenty years before its execution. As I never took Mr. Walpole either for a prophet, or a conjurer, I am certainly far from accusing him of having foreseen Chatterton's melancholy exit, when he



refused him his assistance: yet I am satisfied that every unprejudiced person who now hears me, and who considers the unworthy situations; the moderate habits; the chastised wants of the young man; and his passion for poetry, which, to *him*, was a substitute for the mines of Golconda; I am satisfied that every *such* person can have no doubt that if Horace Walpole had given to this young man a cheap, and easy protection, he would, in all human probability, have been living at this day; highly esteemed for the generosity of his nature; happy in the most propitious of muses; and crowned with poetical glory. This appears, impartially, to *me*, as probable a case, as any character, and fortune in life, which has resulted from more complicated causes: it appears as probable as that a virtuous education generally produces a good, and a licentious education, a bad man. And let us not forget that the moral substance may be as much against us, if we refuse to do a seasonable, and humane, as if we commit a barbarous, and destructive action. From deliberately, and perversely *not* doing good, as much calamity may exist,

as by deliberately, and violently doing evil. And conscience will represent the guilt as plainly, and strongly, to the former as to the latter offender. Motives, and effects are completely known to God; and *He* will, one day, demand an account of both. There is a spurious negative innocence, which has a sophisticated credit, from the venal breath of adulation, and from the deficiency, and absurdity of human laws; but it is severely arraigned, and condemned by the decrees of Heaven. And how can it be otherwise; since it must often be evident, and atrocious guilt, even in the judgement of man?

If Dr. Gregory felt any symptoms of a fever for a bishoprick, while he wrote the life of Chatterton, he could not more powerfully have stimulated the progress, and accesses of that clerical, but unchristian malady, than by the strain of his biography. In its nature, and tendency, it leads directly to a mitre. It is written with all the prudential equilibrium of discretion; with a sanctified candour, humanity, even praise of the *weak*; yet corrected, mixed, and confounded, with prominent censure, and with very discernible

contempt;—that it may not offend the *strong*.

Every species of vice is inconsistent; not only from the moral timidity with which it is accompanied; not only from our incongruous, and incoherent attempts to defend it; but likewise from the repelling energy of the better part of our nature; from our honest, and involuntary efforts to spurn its tyranny. Dr. Gregory is often unequal; nay, he often contradicts himself, on the subject of Chatterton; both as the critick of his works, and the censor of his morals. Sometimes he plunges him into vice, and infidelity; sometimes he seems to regret the depression, and exalts him to virtue. Many parts of his description, and character of our poet, strongly indicate the ardent, and irresistible genius, which is often totally insensible to external objects; and which must be the cause of a peculiarity of manner, while it absorbs the man. In some pages of his narrative, he is in unison with the warm, generous, and elegiack tribute of a Knox; and even with the warrantable, and sympathizing astonishment, and admiration of a Croft. Yet

who could have imagined that when this biographer mentioned the poetical merit of these pieces, he would have prefixed to it the Dutch epithet, *considerable*? who could have imagined that this biographer, after having given us the most affecting characteristicks of a noble disposition, as well as of a sublime genius, could have written the following paragraph?—"He  
 " has descended to the grave with a dubious character; and the only praise  
 " which can be accorded him by the  
 " warmest of his admirers, is that of an  
 " elegant, and ingenious impostor."—Gregory: p. 225.—It is difficult to determine whether, in these remarks, we see more of the effect of the torpid hypercritick, or of the unchristian high priest. But let me give him all the merit which he can claim: he has, in several instances, spoken *out*, and more freely, and independently, than his cotemporaries: for when he wrote, Walpole was living; and fashion was slavish, and imperious.

To every theme on which it is my fortune to write, I wish to do literary justice; impartially, and explicitly; to the utmost extent of my limited judgement. I shall



therefore quote some passages from his book which do credit to the ingenuous degree of his character; which give us a just, and satisfactory idea of the head, and heart of Chatterton; and consequently brand with a merited infamy, the little Turk and his Janizaries; the tyrants, and oppressours, in its immature greatness, of one of the first sublunary creatures of God;—whose insolence even profaned, and violated his ashes; and who, ashamed to acknowledge their guilt, by some atonement, neglected his poor surviving relations; while their selfishness, and vanity contributed to the support of his intellectual remains. You will now be pleased to favour with your attention some interesting quotations from Dr. Gregory.—“About his tenth  
 “year he acquired a taste for reading;  
 “and out of the trifle which was allowed  
 “him by his mother for pocket-money,  
 “he began to hire books from a circulating  
 “library. As his taste was different  
 “from children of *his* age, his dispositions  
 “were also different. Instead of the  
 “thoughtless levity of childhood, he possessed the gravity, pensiveness, and

“ melancholy, of maturer life. His spi-  
 “ rits were uneven ; he was frequently so  
 “ lost in contemplation, that for many  
 “ days together, he would say very little,  
 “ and apparently, by constraint. His  
 “ intimates in the school were few, and  
 “ those of the most serious cast. Between  
 “ his eleventh and twelfth year, he wrote  
 “ a catalogue of the books he had read,  
 “ to the number of seventy. It is rather  
 “ unfortunate that this catalogue was not  
 “ preserved; his sister only informs us  
 “ that they principally consisted of histo-  
 “ ry, and divinity. At the hours allotted  
 “ him for play, he generally retired to  
 “ read ; and he was particularly solicitous  
 “ to borrow books.”—p. 11.—“ He was  
 “ always (says Mr. Smith) extremely  
 “ fond of walking in the fields ; particu-  
 “ larly in Red-cliffe meadows, and of  
 “ talking about these (Rowley’s) manu-  
 “ scripts, and sometimes reading them  
 “ there. Come (he would say) you and  
 “ I will take a walk in the meadow. I  
 “ have got the cleverest thing for you  
 “ imaginable. It is worth half-a-crown,  
 “ merely to have a sight of it, and to hear  
 “ me read it to you.—When we arrived

“ at the place proposed, he would produce  
 “ his parchment, show it, and read it to  
 “ me. There was one spot in particular,  
 “ full in view of the church, in which he  
 “ seemed to take a peculiar delight. He  
 “ would frequently lay himself down,  
 “ fix his eyes upon the church, and seem  
 “ as if he were in a kind of trance. Then  
 “ on a sudden, and abruptly, he would  
 “ tell me;—*that* steeple was burnt down  
 “ by lightning; *that* was the place where  
 “ they formerly acted plays.—His Sun-  
 “ days were commonly spent in walking  
 “ alone into the country about Bristol,  
 “ as far as the duration of day-light would  
 “ allow; and from these excursions he  
 “ never failed to bring home with him  
 “ drawings of churches, or of some other  
 “ objects which had impressed his roman-  
 “ tick imagination.” — p. 45. — “ Mrs.  
 “ Newton, with that unaffected simplici-  
 “ ty which so eminently characterizes her  
 “ letter, most powerfully controverts the  
 “ obloquy which had been thrown upon  
 “ her brother’s memory. She says, that  
 “ while he was at Mr Lambert’s, he visited  
 “ his mother regularly, most evenings,  
 “ before nine o’clock, and they were sel-

“dom two evenings together without  
 “seeing him.”—“He would also frequent-  
 “ly, she says, walk the college-green,  
 “with the young girls that stately pa-  
 “raded there, to show their finery; but  
 “she is persuaded that the reports which  
 “charge him with libertinism are ill-  
 “founded. She could not perhaps have  
 “added a better proof of it, than his in-  
 “clination to associate with modest  
 “women. The testimony of Mr. Thistle-  
 “thwaite is not less explicit, or less  
 “honourable to Chatterton. The op-  
 “portunities, says he, which a long ac-  
 “quaintance with him afforded me, jus-  
 “tify me in saying, that whilst he lived  
 “at Bristol, he was not that debauched  
 “character he was represented. Tem-  
 “perate in his living, moderate in his  
 “pleasures, and regular in his exercises,  
 “he was undeserving of the aspersion.”  
 —pp. 69, 70.—“The activity of his mind  
 “is almost unparalleled. But our sur-  
 “prize must decrease, when we consider  
 “that he slept but little; and that his  
 “whole attention was directed to literary  
 “pursuits; for he declares himself so ig-  
 “norant of his profession, that he was



“ unable to draw out a clearance from  
 “ his apprenticeship, which Mr. Lambert  
 “ demanded.”—p. 80.—“ In a letter to  
 “ his mother, he desires her to call upon  
 “ Mr. Lambert.—Show him *this*, says he,  
 “ with uncommon dignity, and spirit;  
 “ or tell him, if I deserve a recommenda-  
 “ tion, he would oblige me, to give me  
 “ one: If I do *not*, it would be beneath  
 “ him to take notice of me.”—p. 82.—  
 “ The person of Chatterton, like his geni-  
 “ us, was premature: he had a manliness,  
 “ and dignity, beyond his years; and  
 “ there was a something about him un-  
 “ commonly prepossessing. His most  
 “ remarkable feature was his eyes; which  
 “ though grey, were uncommonly pierc-  
 “ ing; when he was warmed in argu-  
 “ ment, or otherwise, they sparkled with  
 “ fire; and one eye, it is said, was still  
 “ more remarkable than the other. His  
 “ genius will be most completely estimat-  
 “ ed from his writings. He had an un-  
 “ common ardour in the pursuit of know-  
 “ ledge, and uncommon facility in the  
 “ attainment of it. It was a favourite  
 “ maxim with *him*, that man is equal to  
 “ any thing; and that every thing might

“ be atchieved by diligence, and abstinence. His imagination, like Dryden’s, was more fertile than correct ; and he seems to have erred, rather through haste, and negligence, than through any deficiency of taste.” \* \* \* \* \*

“ If Rowley, and Chatterton be the same, it will be difficult to say, whether he excelled most in the sublime, or the satirical ; and as a universal genius, he must rank above Dryden ; and perhaps only stand second to Shakespeare. If, on the other hand, we are to judge altogether from those pieces which are confessedly his own, we must undoubtedly assign the preference to those of the satirical class. In most of his serious writings, there is little that indicates their being composed with a FULL RELISH ; when he is satirical, his soul glows in his composition.”—p. 101, &c.  
 —“ He stands charged with a profligate attachment to women ; the accusation, however, is stated in a vague, and desultory manner ; as if from common report ; without any direct, or decided evidence, in support of the opinion. To the regularity of his conduct, during

“ his residence in Bristol, some respect-  
 “ able testimonies have been already ex-  
 “ hibited. It is, indeed, by no means  
 “ improbable, that a young man of strong  
 “ passions, and unprotected by religious  
 “ principles, might frequently be unpre-  
 “ pared to resist the temptations of a licen-  
 “ tious metropolis ; yet even after his ar-  
 “ rival in London, there are some proofs  
 “ in his favour, which ought not to be  
 “ disregarded. During a residence of  
 “ nine weeks at Mr. Walmsley’s, he  
 “ never staid out beyond the family  
 “ hours, except one night, when Mrs.  
 “ Ballance knew that he lodged at the  
 “ house of a relation.”

“ Whatever may be the truth of these  
 “ reports, the list of his virtues still ap-  
 “ pears to exceed the catalogue of his  
 “ faults. His temperance was, in  
 “ some respects, exemplary. He sel-  
 “ dom eat animal food ; and never  
 “ tasted any strong, or spirituous  
 “ liquors : he lived chiefly on a morsel  
 “ of bread, or a tart, with a draught  
 “ of water. His sister affirms that he  
 “ was a lover of truth, from the earliest  
 “ dawn of reason ; and that his school-

“ master depended on his veracity, on all  
 “ occasions : the pride of genius will sel-  
 “ dom descend to the most contemptible  
 “ of vices, falsehood. His high sense of  
 “ dignity has been already noticed, in  
 “ two most striking instances ; but the  
 “ most amiable feature in his character  
 “ was his generosity, and attachment to  
 “ his mother, and relations. Every fa-  
 “ vourite project of his advancement in  
 “ life was accompanied with promises, and  
 “ encouragement to *them* : while in Lon-  
 “ don, he continued to send them pre-  
 “ sents, at a time when he was known  
 “ himself to be in want ; and indeed the  
 “ unremitting attention, kindness, and  
 “ respect, which appear in the whole of  
 “ his conduct towards them, are deserv-  
 “ ing the imitation of those in more for-  
 “ tunate circumstances, and under the in-  
 “ fluence of better principles of faith than  
 “ Chatterton possessed.”

“ He had a number of friends ; and  
 “ notwithstanding his disposition to sa-  
 “ tire, he is scarcely known to have had  
 “ any enemies. By the accounts of all  
 “ who were acquainted with him, there  
 “ was something uncommonly insinuat-



“ ing in his manner, and conversation.  
 “ Mr. Cross informed Mr. Warton that  
 “ in Chatterton’s frequent visits, while he  
 “ resided in Brook-Street, he found his  
 “ conversation, a little infidelity excepted,  
 “ most captivating. His extensive,  
 “ though in many instances, superficial  
 “ knowledge, united with his genius, wit,  
 “ and fluency, must have admirably ac-  
 “ complished him for the pleasures of so-  
 “ ciety. His pride, which, perhaps  
 “ should rather be termed the strong con-  
 “ sciousness of intellectual excellence,  
 “ did not destroy his affability. He was  
 “ always accessible, and rather forward  
 “ to make acquaintance than apt to de-  
 “ cline the advances of others. There is  
 “ reason, however, to believe, that the  
 “ inequality of his spirits affected greatly  
 “ his behaviour in company. His fits of  
 “ absence were frequent, and long. He  
 “ would often look stedfastly in a person’s  
 “ face, without speaking, or seeming to  
 “ see the person, for a quarter of an  
 “ hour, or more.”—p. 108, &c.

Dr. Gregory favours his readers with  
 the following humane, and generous tri-  
 bute which Mr. Knox payed to his me-

mory.—“ Unfortunate boy! short, and  
 “ evil were thy days; but thy fame shall  
 “ be immortal. Hadst thou been known  
 “ to the *municipal* patrons of genius!”—

“ Unfortunate boy! poorly wast thou  
 “ accommodated, during thy short so-  
 “ journings among us; rudely wast thou  
 “ treated; sorely did thy feeling soul suf-  
 “ fer from the scorn of the unworthy;  
 “ and there are, at last, those who wish to  
 “ rob thee of thy only meed, thy posthu-  
 “ mous glory. Severe, too, are the cen-  
 “ sures of thy morals. In the gloomy  
 “ moments of despondency, I fear thou  
 “ hast uttered impious, and blasphemous  
 “ thoughts, which none can defend; and  
 “ which neither thy youth, nor thy fiery  
 “ spirit, nor thy situation can excuse.  
 “ But let thy more rigid censors reflect  
 “ that thou wast literally, and strictly,  
 “ but a boy. Let many of thy bitterest  
 “ enemies reflect, what were their own  
 “ religious principles, and whether they  
 “ had *any*, at the age of fourteen, fifteen,  
 “ and sixteen. Surely it is a severe, and  
 “ an unjust surmise, that thou wouldest  
 “ probably have ended thy life as a victim  
 “ of the laws, if thou hadst not finished

“ it as thou didst ; since the very act by  
 “ which thou durst put an end to thy  
 “ painful existence, proves that thou  
 “ thoughtest it better to die than support  
 “ life by theft, or violence.”

“ The speculative errors of a boy, who  
 “ wrote from the sudden suggestions  
 “ of passion, or despondency ; who is  
 “ not convicted of any immoral, or dis-  
 “ honest act, in consequence of his spe-  
 “ culations, ought to be consigned to ob-  
 “ livion. But there seems to be a general,  
 “ and inveterate dislike to the boy, ex-  
 “ clusively of the poet ; a dislike which  
 “ many will be ready to impute, and in-  
 “ deed not without the appearance of rea-  
 “ son, to that insolence, and envy, of the  
 “ *little great*, which cannot bear to ac-  
 “ knowledge so transcendent, and com-  
 “ manding a superiority, in the humble  
 “ child of want, and obscurity.”

“ Malice, if there was any, may surely  
 “ now be at rest. For “ ‘ cold he lies in  
 “ ‘ the grave below.’ ”—But where were  
 “ *ye*, O ye friends to genius, when, stung  
 “ with disappointment ; distressed for  
 “ food, and raiment ; with every frightful  
 “ form of human misery, painted on his

“ fine imagination, poor Chatterton  
 “ sunk in despair?—Alas ! ye knew him  
 “ not *then*; and now, it is too late;—“ ‘ For  
 “ ‘ now he is dead;’ ”—“ ‘ Gone to his  
 “ ‘ death-bed;’ ”—“ ‘ All under the wil-  
 “ ‘ low tree.’ ”—So sang the sweet youth,  
 “ in as tender an elegy as ever flowed from  
 “ a feeling heart.”

“ In return for the pleasure I have re-  
 “ ceived from thy poems, I pay thee, poor  
 “ boy, the trifling tribute of my praise.  
 “ Thyself thou hast emblazoned; thine  
 “ own monument thou hast erected: but  
 “ they whom thou hast delighted, feel a  
 “ pleasure in vindicating thine honours  
 “ from the rude attacks of detraction.”  
 —p. 120, &c.

These quotations from Dr. Gregory's life of Chatterton, abound with proofs of a most amiable, and noble disposition; and of an original, and prodigious genius. Mr. Walpole (a meaner heart than *his* never impelled the animal economy) adopted, or rather created the evil report, that the young, and, in a moral sense, incompletely formed original of this charming picture, was *a bad man*. He loads his memory with the charge of almost



every kind of profligacy. He was an industrious, and ingenious refiner on iniquity, and barbarity. After the death of his victim, he carefully collected every paper that was, in any way, injurious to his reputation, and that was written by inexperience, from the juvenile impulse of the moment; and printed them at Strawberry-Hill;—*not* the sacred hill of the muses, from which the pure, and chrysal, and poetical Aganippe flowed; but a hill, blooming, indeed, with vernal, and delusive honours; but the parent of a muddy, and contaminated fountain; prolifick of dullness, and envy; and of presumptuous, absurd, and uncharitable censure. *This was his* mode of apologizing for his treatment of Chatterton. The moral baseness was aggravated; it was doubled, by the machination, by the unfeeling efforts of this apology. The strain of his flatterers ran parallel to his own; destitute of conscience as of sentiment, they threw every moral aspersion on the character of Chatterton; they had even the audacity to assert, that if he had lived to see many future years, he would, in all probability, have grown so despe-

rate in wickedness, that he would have suffered that premature death, from the sentence of publick justice, which he rashly inflicted on himself, with his own hand. When you consider the cause of this most unprincipled cruelty, to an unfortunate, and illustrious memory ; your contempt, your detestation of it, must act very powerfully in your minds. For if we throw but a superficial eye on the several circumstances of the case, it must be evident, beyond all dispute, that Chatterton would never have been overwhelmed with this torrent of obloquy, and insult, if it had not taken its origin, and its course, from a most immoral, servile, and disgraceful respect for Walpole. His persecution of the poet, even beyond the grave, is rendered peculiarly odious, and contemptible, by the mean hypocrisy with which it is varnished ; by its disingenuous, and cowardly pretence to benevolence ;—by the *anxious adviser* ;—by the *tender guardian* ;—by the blasphemy of a moral insensibility, arrogating to itself a practical christianity.

If I have all along been a warm, I have been a conscientious advocate, for my

much loved, for my much admired youth; and I hope that you have not yet forgotten my ingenuous pleading in his cause: you have likewise heard what Dr. Gregory, that accomplished Atticus;—I mean, in *trimming*, has ventured not only to narrate, but even to produce, as his own opinion, in his favour. I must, therefore, beg leave, again to repeat my caution: I too well know the force both of general, and individual prejudice; but I appeal to your unbiassed hearts, and to your unbiassed understandings. I ask *them*, which of the two parties has been atrociously unjust, and abusive: I ask *them*, if the enemies of Chatterton have not evidently deserved these epithets; and if, in censuring *their* extraordinary iniquity, and barbarity, I have not used, only that unreserved, strong, and adequate language, which became an honest man; in whose breast every inferiour consideration gave way to an ardent, and commendable zeal, on a most affecting, and interesting subject, to the cause of humanity, truth, and justice.

The life, and the memory of Chatterton were singular in misfortune. He is

vilified even by his apparent friends. The editor of his Miscellanies, who professes the highest admiration of his genius; who justly, and severely blames the conduct of Mr. Walpole; and who threw that gentleman into the fright which produced his false, whining, and vulgar apology; even *he* is so stupid, and foolish, as to adopt the unfounded, and base calumny which had been excited against him; *he* has the unreflecting temerity to tell the publick, that “he possessed all the  
 “vices, and irregularities of youth; and  
 “that his profligacy was, at least, as conspicuous as his abilities.”—I trust that the pure, and preserving balm which has been bestowed on the memory of Chatterton, by many impartial, and benevolent hands, will prove an effectual antidote against the wound of this inconsistent, and vile assassin, who stabs with *one* hand, while he pays his homage with *another*.



## *LECTURE XVII.*

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### CHATTERTON.

On my last quotations I beg leave to make some remarks, relative both to the morals, and to the poetry of Chatterton.

“ He declares himself so ignorant of  
“ his profession, that he was unable to  
“ draw out a clearance from his appren-  
“ ticeship, which Mr. Lambert demand-  
“ ed.”—Gregory : p. 80.—This was one  
of the many proofs that we have of that  
immensity of genius which engrosses, and  
transports its possessour; which makes  
him elude even the grasp of an attorney. If  
Chatterton’s mind had been but naturally,  
and strongly formed for elegant literature,  
he could not have endured the trammels  
of the law, without much pain; nor  
without an impelling anticipation of for-

tune, and of fame, in the profession. But involved as *his* mind was, in the images, and views of superlative genius, it was impossible for him to give any collected, and earnest attention to dry forms, and mechanical operations; *such* attention would have been a miracle; for it would have been incompatible with “the genial current of his soul.”—If he had accurately drawn out his clearance from Lambert, he would not so gloriously have served his time under Apollo. And yet a Walpole, and a Gregory, were for chaining down this free, and ethereal spirit, to the legal galley of precedents, demurrers, replications, and rejoinders. When such men give the law to indigent abilities, they take every thing into their statutes but common sense, nature, and humanity.

In a letter to his mother he says [p. 82.] “Tell Mr. Lambert, if I deserve a recommendation, he would oblige me to give me one; if I do *not*, it would be beneath him to take notice of me.”—This passage is extremely characteristic of Chatterton: it shows that independence, and elevation of soul,

which made a part of his sublime mental constitution; and that veneration of truth, which he always entertained, and practised; whenever truth was of *moral importance*.

“It is by no means improbable” (says Dr. Gregory) “that a young man of strong passions, and unprotected by religious principles, might frequently be unprepared to resist the temptations of a licentious metropolis.”—p. 109.—A young man may be frail, without being profligate; if he is sometimes frail, though habitually virtuous, we need not be anxious for his confirmation in virtue. If he turns profligate, it is to be feared that he is lost for ever. Our just hopes, and fears of a youth will be in proportion to our good sense; to our liberality of sentiments; to our knowledge of human nature. *These* were our Saviour’s moral criteria; *he* knew what was in man; and therefore, as the judge of man, he was mild, tender, and indulgent. But priests act otherwise; *they* are perpetually going westward, when *he* is going to the east; the undistinguishing tyrants have an undistinguishing bed; and they stretch,

and chop, and hack, every victim that they can seize, to one common, and destructive measure. How can it reasonably be supposed, that a susceptible young person, though he may already have made a great proficiency in amiable, and generous virtue, will not yield to *some* seduction, in an elegant, and gay metropolis; whether he be a sceptick, or a true believer; especially if nature hath endowed him with a great genius in the province of imagination; since *that* kind of genius cannot exist without strong passions? Nay, virtue herself, the goddess of supreme attraction, cannot exist without these passions; by modelling, and governing *them*, she acquires her title, and the exercise of her empire; completely modelled, controuled, and directed by *her* government, they incorporate with her essence; and flush her beauty with all its animation. Hence, if a youth, in London, is rigidly temperate, and accurate in his conduct, we shall have reason to fear for those future endowments, for those future *virtues*, which are the only true glory of human nature; we shall have reason to apprehend that his moral pro-



cess will terminate, and be fixed in mere spiritless discretion ; the caput mortuum of virtue ; or rather that it will reduce his mind to a composition of base, and malignant qualities ; and that his determined character will be the mean, and infamous *Blifil*, whom we hate, and despise ; not the generous, and noble *Jones*, whom we love, and admire. May the actions of my friends, and myself, never be at the mercy of those short-sighted, and iron-hearted moralists, who, while they rigorously exact the *duties*, make no equitable allowances for the *nature* of man !

As I am now endeavouring fairly to represent the moral character of Chatterton, and to do justice to his much injured memory, I must take particular notice of his sincere, and ardent affection for his relations, and friends ; and of his constant, and uniform attention to them, during his short, and unfortunate abode in London. The merit of his attention can never be excelled, if we consider the agitations, and tumults, which his feeling, and great soul must then have often suffered from its unequal, and oppressive

destiny. *Good* fortune is very apt to make people forget their poor relations ; a situation in which they ought most kindly, and effectually to remember them : it was Chatterton's favourite pleasure, or consolation, to send presents to his grandmother, mother, and sister, when he was in the most distressful, and alarming circumstances ; when famine, with all her horrors, was invading him ; and when death made one of her appalling train. While his spirits were raised by a deceitful world, acting on the unexperienced, and sanguine gaiety of youth, he says to his sister, in a letter of the 30th of May, 1770 ; — “ if money flowed as fast upon me as honours, I would give you a portion of five thousand pounds.” In the same letter he expresses a tender, and affectionate sympathy with the friends of Mrs. Carty, on a melancholy disorder with which that gentlewoman was afflicted ; and he writes a prescription for her which is well adapted to her case. His letter concludes in this impressive manner : — “ I sincerely wish my mother, and grandmother happy ; when it is in *my* power to make them so, they *shall* be

“so.”—Gregory; p. 254.—On the 8th of July, 1770, when his juvenile hopes must have lost their bloom; after he had removed to Brook-Street in Holborne, he thus concludes a letter to his mother, in which he had mentioned several little presents that he *had* sent, and which he intended to send to her, and to his sister, and grand-mother:—“Be assured, whenever I have the power, my will wo’nt be wanting to testify that I remember you.”—A letter to his sister, of July 11th 1770, contains this affectionate, and interesting period:—“Be assured that I shall ever make *your* wants *my* wants; and stretch to the utmost to serve you.”

The various, and authentick testimonies which Dr. Gregory has communicated to us, of his veracity, of his religious regard for moral truth, show, that he thought his Rowley, and the antiquated dress of his poetry, as allowable, and innocent as any other poetical fictions; and from those testimonies we may likewise infer, that he only meant to make an experiment of his poetical fortune, and fame; and that he intended, at what *he* might think a proper time, to make a full dis-

covery to the world, of all his literary ingenuity, and of the astonishing powers of his mind.

The character of this youth was so far from being base, and profligate, that in all its leading instances, it was enchantingly amiable, and astonishingly great. When he was very young, perhaps five, or six years old, a manufacturer promised to Mrs. Chatterton a present of earthen ware, for her children. “What device” (said he to the boy) “shall I paint on the gift which I intend for *you*?”—“Paint me (said he) an angel, with wings, and a trumpet, to trumpet my name over the world.”—Gregory ; a note at page 8.—So soon did a glorious ambition inflame the breast of this boy, whom nature had formed for a series of high achievements; if her kindness had not been defeated by the rigour of man. This ambition is always born with genius ; and the greater the genius is, the greater is the ambition. It is *necessary*, to accomplish the providence of heaven ; to give mankind their best instructions, and their best pleasure ; to diffuse intellectual light, and beauty over the world. It is *this*



ambition which invigorates, and accelerates the wing of imagination ; which buoys it up, above the storms of adversity, while they do not attack the principles of life ; which keeps the mind impassive, or superior to a dreary situation, and to obstinate neglect ; which makes us feast on stale bread, and simple water ; which makes us endure a Chesterfield, for our patron, and a Walpole for our guardian.

A propos ! The ingenuous, and humane Mr. Walpole informs the publick, that Chatterton “ poisoned himself, on “ being refused a loaf of bread.”—Here, we have the most cruel, and abandoned insinuation ; that he poisoned himself for a trifling cause. Thou unfeeling wretch ! thou polished barbarian ! The refusal of the loaf was a sentence of fate which ought to have been pronounced on *thee* ; it was the harbinger of famine, and despair. The alternative to magnanimity *then* was, to beg in the streets of London, or to die ! And whatever our mitred pharisees ; whatever our *Walpolian* christians may say, *I* shall beg leave humbly, and sincerely ; and I hope, in the *true* spirit of christianity, to say, that

as Chatterton was the object of the alternative; the greatness of its object, and the iniquity of his fortune, almost expunged the guilt of the decision.

Dr. Gregory does injustice to Chatterton, as a censor of his morals; he does injustice to him, as a critick of his writings. I shall not enter into the particulars of his comparison of *him* with Dryden; for the comparison is altogether absurd, and ridiculous. The progress, and the improvement in poetry, of the *one*, went through a long life: and thanks be to God, who protects, and invigorates old age, if it is not wanting to itself; the fire of Dryden was brightest, and most ardent, at a short time before it mounted to a better world. Dryden had been favoured by Providence with a liberal, and complete literary education; he had regularly stored his mind with all the treasures of elegant learning; by long, and habitual reading, and reflexion; by long, and habitual exercise, and exertion of his genius; he was an old, and great master, in the various arts of composition.—Chatterton, as it were, instantaneously, seized all *his* excellence, with a kind of poetical

omnipotence; he seized it from slavery; from time; from poverty; from the most horrible circumstances that can be imagined; he seized it from the brandished dart of death. It ill becomes a dull churchman, lounging, and dozing on a sofa, to appreciate the deserts of two great poets: even to accuse Dryden of negligence, if we recollect the difficulties of that illustrious man, is as improper as it is absurd; but to censure the negligence of Chatterton, whose life was infinitely shorter, and whose distresses were far greater than Dryden's, is a most unpardonable insult; it is the very extreme of barbarity.

It is one of the many misfortunes of genius, to be tried by formal, and phlegmatick judges, who have not a particle in their own constitutions, that is congenial with poetry. Shakespeare, like Dryden, is not naturally introduced, but preposterously dragged, before this critical tribunal; — into this award of poetical excellence. That divine poet, unrivalled in his department, from an imitative, and affected admiration of him; an admiration without precision, and without distinction: has often

been compared with *other* poets, when the different kinds of talent, or the different kinds of writing, of those poets, made the reciprocal merit, and consequently, the reciprocal estimate of that merit, incompatible. When Dr. Gregory tells me that “ Chatterton must rank above Dryden, and perhaps only stand second to “ Shakespeare ;” — “ when Mr. Malone “ believes him to have been the greatest “ genius that England has produced, “ since the days of Shakespeare ;” these gentlemen do not enounce the doctrine of sound and rational criticism. And as in the disquisitions of both, we never see the penetrating ray of a Burke, nor the impassioned sentiment of a Longinus ; we must expect from both, cold, and vague unideal conjectures ; yet frequently emboldened with a pragmatick sanction ; instead of apposite and illustrative imagery ; instead of instructive, and splendid truth. The absurdity of comparing Chatterton with Shakespeare is as great as that of comparing him with Dryden. English literature (of which if we make a proper use, we may dispense with all *other* literature) was far from maturity, in the reign



of Elizabeth: yet the opportunities of instructive reading, and conversation; the incitements to exertion, and to fame, which Shakespeare enjoyed, were far more advantageous than those which were attainable by the unfortunate Chatterton. I am not one of the pedants who give a scholastick, and proud importance to external aids; I know that genius is almost self-taught; that it can work wonders on its own invisible foundation. Yet a happy, and extensive cultivation must enlarge, and invigorate every mind; and the greatest minds will evidently draw the most advantages from that cultivation. What crowns the absurdity of these comparisons is, the extreme disparity in the extent of their lives. Shakespeare died in the decline of human life; when we may reasonably conclude that the powers of his mind had arrived at all their natural maturity; and when they had gained all the advantages of social, attentive, and studious improvement. Chatterton was cut off when he was just blooming into life; the fatal moment which terminated his existence on earth,

at once precluded the physical, and elaborate growth of his mental force.

Let us compare, however, what may *reasonably* be compared. As to what Dr. Gregory says of Chatterton's negligence, it is altogether groundless, and futile. The care, and accuracy, which polish, and adorn the poems that he wrote under the name of Rowley, and which he undoubtedly meant for the decisive test of his genius, are as conspicuous as the poetical spirit of their authour. If Dr. Gregory still doubts whether those poems are the real productions of Chatterton, I can only say that I am answerable for no man's folly but my own. Most of the pieces which are confessedly Chatterton's, were written on *common* occasions; from the momentary impulse of the heart, or fancy. Yet I trust that it has been made evident to you, that in some passages of those more desultory compositions, the personifier of Rowley hath unequivocally appeared on his own poetical stage. In continuing to compare what is comparable, I shall farther observe, that his *Ælla*, and his *Godwin*, but especially the former,

would not be unworthy companions of the best dramatical productions of Shakespeare: they are, indeed, far superiour to several plays, which the tyranny of custom first, and the sanction of dry, verbal criticks, afterwards, have classed with the glories of that immortal man; and in which, I am satisfied that his genius, and his hand, had *very* little, if *any* part. And as the sublime in writing, undoubtedly most eminently marks the greatness of the poet, examples might easily be produced, which would prove that Chatterton; the poor, despised charity-boy of Bryant, and the reprobate of Walpole, was a poet superiour to Dryden; —was a poet superiour to Shakespeare. The sublime is by no means a prevailing characteristick of either of these great poets. I well remember that in one of my conversations with Dr. Johnson, he insisted, with his usual hardiness, and extremity of assertion, that it would be difficult to find *one*\* sublime passage in

\* This remark of Dr. Johnson on the poetry of Shakespeare originated from his perusal of my criticism on Dr. Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, in the *Critical Review* of June, 1770; in which I had observed, that “none of the ancient poets are so sublime as

Shakespeare. I never was a dupe to the mere assertion of any man : but it is certain that sublimity is not the pride of Shakespeare's poetry. A poet is not to be blamed, or undervalued, because he is not lavish of graces, and honours which are not required in *his* peculiar province. The sublime is not a constituent, it is not a requisite of the drama. In *all* its requisites ; in equal felicity in the tragick, and comick vein ; in unfolding every motion of the human heart ; in producing to our interested, and eager view, all the variety, and all the various operations of the human passions ; in expressing, in painting them, with the utmost propriety, perspicuity, and force of language ; in the most honourable department of a great master of morality ; in awfully deterring us from vice ; in powerfully exciting us to virtue ; in *these* inestimable poetical properties ; in all *this* poetical glory ; Shakespeare never *was*, and probably never *will* be equalled. And let  
 “our divine Shakespeare, and Milton.”—In the course of thirty two years, I hope that I have acquired more accuracy in distinguishing poetical excellence. But I am as convinced as I ever was, that all other poets are excelled by our great English poets.



me not forget, while I am offering my humble, but grateful tribute, to the prince of the British theatre ; to the prince of all theatres ; let me not forget his inventive, his creative genius. He could form, when he pleased, a totally original drama ; aerial, and grotesque beings were at *his* command : yet so happy were his combinations ; so charmingly fascinating was his romance ; that even while he *exceeded*, he seemed only to *extend* the bounds of nature.

A transition from Shakespeare to Chatterton is in the perfect order of creation. If we consider what he *did*, and what he *might* have done ; if we consider his short life, and to what an age it might naturally have been prolonged ; what a great, what an irreparable loss, must every sensible, and cultivated mind feel that it has sustained, in his death !—There is a quickness, and vivacity ; there is a natural politeness in some juvenile minds, which are very different from genius ; yet they cheat us with its appearance. These properties are apt to throw themselves upon paper ; our candour, and our affection are prepared to admire their effusi-

ons ; and youth deludes us with our indulgence, and with our hopes. The young versifier grows the man ; but his literary attempts receive no progressive strength ; the glittering veil vanishes ; he takes his actual, and established place, in the scale of intellect ; and impartiality, and good sense pronounce him but a *common* character. This is not the case with *true* genius\* : if it breaks forth in

\* We have illustrious examples of the vigour of genius increasing with extreme old age. Temperance, that chaste handmaid of nature, will effect wonders. It would, however, be absurd not to allow that our mental faculties often decline with our bodily strength. Our nature admits various kinds of modification, of progress, and of decay. Therefore, with Mr. Walpole, and Dr. Gregory, and other superficial observers, who, from ignorance, or inattention, promiscuously adopt commonly received opinions ; who, to liberal advocates for all the possible, and well-known extent of our best powers, object their imaginary *premature* genius, and its doubtful promises ;—with those gentlemen ; admitting their trite theory of the rise, meridian, and decline of intellectual force ; for the sake of more comprehensive, and useful argument ; I should beg leave to reason in the following manner.—To talk of premature genius, is to talk what is not sense. Human minds differ infinitely in their natural growth, as in all their other operations. The genius which is completely mature at twenty years of age, is not *premature*, more than *that* which arrives not at its full maturity till its fortieth year. They attain their utmost vigour at very different periods of life ; but both, in the established, and regular order of nature.

early life, it always mounts higher with years ; it flourishes, it triumphs, under the hoariness of age. Consequently, if Chatterton had lived to those venerable years, his genius, and his fame would have been commensurate with their number ; he would have excelled Dryden, and Shakespeare ; and every poet, of every age, and nation.—*Milton* himself ; who was an equally great master of the beautiful, and of the sublime ; *he* who hath always appeared to *me*, rather a demi-god than a man ; he, who, in numbers corresponding with their objects, led the Cherubim, and Seraphim, to war ; who made “ the stedfast empyrean shake  
 “ throughout ; all but the throne itself of  
 “ God,” under the chariot of the Messiah ; who, in adequate strains, described the thunder of the Almighty ; even *Milton* himself, with all his divine energy, magnificence, and majesty, must have bowed before him. Justly, then, might the judicious, and benevolent Mr. Croft assert, that “ no such human being, at *any* period of life, has ever been known ; or  
 “ possibly ever *will* be known.”—Gregory ; p. 114.—Will any frigid critick, with

the obtrusion of *his* imitative, and trite comparisons; with his undistinguishing, with his affected idolatry of Shakespeare; will *he* presume to limit the power of the Creator, in the formation of the human mind? Will he seem to say to him, by dragging forth, on every occasion, his fancied model of intellectual perfection; “hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther?” Does he reflect that we are made after the divine image? And dares he, even in thought, to circumscribe the expansion, the amplification of that image? Man is a compound, a contrasted, a mysterious being. He is limited, in his weakness; he is unlimited, in his powers;—“Helpless immortal! insect infinite!”—“A worm;—a God!”

Dr. Gregory gives us the following absurd piece of criticism.—“It must not be dissembled that some (and many will think no inconsiderable) part of the charm of these poems may probably result from *the gothick sublimity of the style*. Whatever is vulgar in language is lost by time; and a small degree of obscurity in an ancient authour gives a latitude to the fancy of the reader,



“ who generally imagines the style to be  
 “ more forcible, and expressive than per-  
 “ haps it intrinsically is. We gaze with  
 “ wonder on an antique fabrick ; and  
 “ when novelty of thought is not to be  
 “ obtained, the novelty of language to  
 “ which we are unaccustomed, is fre-  
 “ quently accepted as a substitute. Most  
 “ poets, therefore, at least, such as have  
 “ aspired to the sublime, have thrown  
 “ their dialect at least a century behind  
 “ the common prose, and colloquial  
 “ phraseology of their time ; nor can we  
 “ entertain a doubt that even Shakespeare  
 “ and Milton have derived advantages  
 “ from the antique structure of some of  
 “ their most admired passages. The fa-  
 “ cility of composition is also greatly in-  
 “ creased where full latitude is permitted  
 “ in the use of an obsolete dialect ; since  
 “ an authour is indulged in the occasional  
 “ use of both the old, and the modern  
 “ phraseology ; and if the one does not  
 “ supply him with the word for which he  
 “ has immediate occasion, the other, in  
 “ all probability, will not disappoint  
 “ him.”—Gregory; p. 152.

To talk of the gothick sublimity of

style is nonsense. There can be no sublimity in mere words, which are, here, only, considered. I am certain that Mr. Bryant was deluded into an admiration of *his* Rowley's poems, principally by this gothick excellence which is so much over-valued by Dr. Gregory ; but every sensible reader, of an unaffected, and genuine taste, would have admired them as they deserved, if they had been written avowedly by Chatterton, with the spirit, and attention which *he* bestowed on them ; and in the modern, but pure, and classical language which prevailed in our Augustan age. In proportion as a poet is obscure, in meaning, or in style, he is *unpoetical* ; all *real* obscurity checks that pleasurable current ; that enthusiastick glow of the soul, which true poetry, more than all the other fine arts, excites, and impells. The painter, indeed, judiciously averted, and shaded the face of a father, agonizing in grief ; and our unrivalled Milton throws out an uncircumscribed, and terrifick sketch of the image of death ; but can *these* instances of the most fortunate art ; of the unlimited conceptions of the poet, be compared with a meagre ver-

bal obscurity, which, in a moment, arrests the flow of ideas, and numbers; which annihilates the fair creatures of sentiment, and imagination?—No: in *these* instances, the irregular, and incomplete, but bold, and expressive strokes of the painter, instead of weakening, mutilating, and contracting, his picture, give it strength, and animation; and aggrandize its form, and manner. The poet leaves an unbounded scope for the active, and plastic workings; for the spiritual delight of his own mind; and thus he provides a similar field of active imagery; of refined entertainment, for his congenial readers. This is *not* the obscurity, but the light of genius; streaming with the rays which indicate its inspirer;—the ἐκηβολὸν Ἀπολλωνῶα. It opens the expansion; the infinity of poetical creation. The mind seizes the hints of its great archetype; connects, and finishes the rude, but prominent portrait; repeatedly returns to its enraptured work; improves the figure to a more striking likeness; gives it a more awful aspect; a more commanding air; and exults, and tri-

umphs in its forming, in its *creating* power.

Obscurity of style gives no latitude to the fancy ; it has nothing to do with fancy ; it has but *one*, and *that* is a very bad effect ; it shuts out both the fancy, and the understanding. As to those readers who feel some occult, but interesting force, and expression in what they do not understand ; and who accept, with pleasure, novelty of words for novelty of thought ; I am going to pass a sentence upon *them* which they cannot fairly think severe ; I only wish that they may always read authours who have written agreeably to *their* taste ; and that true genius may never be profaned by *their* perusal. A *foolish* man “ gazes with wonder at an “ ancient fabrick ;”—a *wise* man views it with moral as well as poetical impressions ; with a religious awe. These sentiments are affected not only by the venerable style of the old architecture ; but by corresponding objects of the eye, and of the recollection ; by the circumjacent landscape, which unites with it, in the mute, but connected, and strong eloquence



of art, and nature ; by calling to memory, or to imagination, the illustrious worthies by whom it was once inhabited ; and by melancholy, but salutary reflexions, on the fragility, and brevity of all human glory. Can it be said that he avails himself of such lively, and significant auxiliaries as *these*, who, impoverished of ideas, levies a base contribution on the shapeless, and unmeaning lumber of obsolete words ?

It has been the constant, and stupid custom of undistinguishing, and mechanical criticks, in their ideas, and observations, totally to separate, and dis sever language from thoughts ; to tear the surface from the essence ; the shell from the pith of literature. This is a kind of literary impiety ; *here* it may be said, with a more natural, and congruous orthodoxy, than it is often pronounced in the conubial rite ;—“ those whom God hath  
 • “ joined together, let no man put asunder.”—Indeed — (I speak it with an humble, and prostrate reverence !) as matter seems to be intimately, and wonderfully connected with the supreme, and eternal mind ; and with an inconceivable

quickness obeys his motions; so man, whom he formed, in *some* degree, after his own image; whom he formed, a *reasoning*;—when he forms him an *eloquent* being; in the moment in which he thinks justly, and elegantly, thinks in the most just, and elegant words. Their promptitude is more than instantaneous; nay there seems to be a perpetual coalescence between *them*, and their *ideas*:—or, again to compare what, in the comparison, is infinitely small, and insignificant, with what is infinitely great, and awful; a clearness, and force of expression seems to flow from a clearness, and force of thought; as creation flowed from the *fiat* of the Creator. Ideas, and words, in the act of composition, are soul, and body, to each other; you know nothing of them; therefore you can justly remark nothing of them, but in their united state.

By all that I have urged, I did not mean to say, that excellent literary composition is an *easy* task. No; it is an arduous; it is, at once, a painful, and a pleasing task:—*not* the least painful to genius; for in writing, as in life, fools, and coxcombs, are commonly most easily satis-

fied with themselves, and their performances. But the difficulty lies in the invisible, and mental work. To form, and dispose your plan ; to select, as you proceed, the most proper, and pertinent ideas, from many which are apt to arise, in a vigorous, and fertile mind ; to adjust, and arrange these ideas, from the beginning to the close of your plan, in a happily combined order, and harmony, of prose, or poetry ; it is the accomplishment of *these* difficulties that puts to the stretch those faculties which are so highly privileged, and so glorious, in this nether world. But what have words been doing, during all this charming, this creating process of the mind ? They have kept a momentary, and indivisible time with ideas ; the best words have been indissoluble from the best thoughts : and he who has abilities to meditate, and to complete this golden concatenation, will never divert it into any *mean* obliquity ; he will never be obliged to substitute an uncouth *word* for an elegant *idea* ; he will never be an intellectual bankrupt ; when he owes us *gold*, he will not pay us with a *counter*.

The force of these remarks (and I hope that they may claim some force, both from nature, and from proper practice) is not at all invalidated by two illustrious examples, Spenser, and Chatterton. The language of the fifteenth century, which the latter was industrious to adopt, (and surely, if we reflect on all his opposing circumstances, we must admire his ingenuity, and success)—we know that he adopted, to serve a particular purpose; to promote a deception. And as he did not use this vehicle of his thoughts, from an inelegant taste; from a barbarous affectation; and as it conveys highly cultivated poetry; we cheerfully take that trouble to be familiar with its words, which it is the duty of an undisguised poet to prevent.

With regard to Spenser, *his* affectation of language that was obsolete even in *his* time, is well known; and by good criticks it has always been justly blamed. Some *great* writers have had singularities which no *good* writer would imitate; but the erroneous practice of the few condemns not the judicious practice of the many; much less can we give it any force against



the eternal laws of truth, and nature. Taste does not always depend on the progressive refinement of ages ; we shall find that in every age it is essentially included in great genius ; as the less is included in the greater ; though great geniuses may not entirely escape the barbarisms of their time. Nature, therefore, had rather with a sparing hand implanted in Spenser's mind the principles of taste. He who aspires to excellence in literary composition, should no more imitate this fault of Spenser, than he should take for his models many passages in the writings of our late justly celebrated Johnson, which abound with words of a scholastic hardness, and asperity.—There is a grammatical accuracy ; a gravity ; a dignity ; a force ; nay, often a poetical elegance in his manner ; but the love of the *sesquipedalia verba* too frequently returns ; because *he*, too, with a luminous, and vigorous mind, and in a more polished age than that of Spenser, was deficient in taste. There is no truly fine writing without simplicity ; but as this simplicity implies elegance too, it must be studied, and acquired, to have its complete graces.

Nor will it be acquired but by souls corresponding with its beauty; by those whom nature hath blessed with an acutely distinguishing penetration, and with a native delicacy of mind. Nor is it necessary that this Minerva of eloquence should be a plain, and unadorned goddess: Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Cicero, and Livy, among the ancients; and Dryden (I have his admirable prose as well as his poetry, in my eye) Dryden, Bolingbroke, and Burke, among the moderns; have shown that she can legitimately assume a splendour; a magnificence; a chastised pomp of dress, and manner.

Dr. Gregory; to strengthen his whimsical doctrine of the cabalistical force of mere words, introduces the two greatest authorities in the world, that of Milton, and Shakespeare. *They*, according to *his* opinion, are among the writers, who, aspiring to the sublime, found it necessary to invigorate their efforts by adopting antiquated words; by adopting the style of a century before their own times. Milton, and Shakespeare, are the very examples whom I should have chosen, to demonstrate the futility of *his* theory,

and to establish the truth of *mine*. The faults of both poets, as they affected good composition, principally resulted from the imperfect, and rude state of literature, at the age in which they lived. Literary, as well as moral example is contagious; very virtuous men will, in *some* degree, be infected with the one; the most exalted genius will, occasionally, be debased with the other. Indeed, in some provinces of the muse, the greatest poets have thought themselves obliged, from the ungenerous motives of interest, (it is to be lamented that excellent minds should ever be reduced to this necessity) sometimes to comply with the vulgar, low manners, and habits of their times. Thus our unfortunate Dryden, as a dramatick writer, acknowledges that he had written *some scenes which were bad enough to please*. And hence, undoubtedly, Shakespeare, the father, and the sovereign of the British theatre, too often sinks infinitely below himself; and intersperses the native effusions of his mind with puns, and quibbles; with unreasonable, and miserable jesting, and humour, which would damn the best written play, even

in *these* days, when we are sinking to an insipid, and effeminate barbarity ; the prevailing lustre would not redeem the dark spots ; if, indeed, in times of degenerated understanding, and sentiment, *that* lustre could be thoroughly seen, and felt. We meet with no kind of obscurity in Shakespeare, when he speaks directly, and warmly, from himself ; from the clear, and exhaustless fund of nature, which characterizes, while it supplies the poet : we have nothing to check, nothing to retard us, in accompanying the varied flights of *his* muse ; except the passages to which I have referred, of a vicious eloquence ; and if we likewise except some allusions to old facts, or customs, in his unexceptionable, in his bright passages ; the origin of which is inevitably lost, or disputed, by a long lapse of time. All *these* instances have not the least relation to that unnatural, and elaborate verbal obscurity ; to that antiquated mechanism, which impressed Dr. Gregory with the infinite, but repulsive ideas of the sublime.

I think that I can apply analogous reasoning, and with equal justice, to



Milton. The constitutional beauty, delicacy, and sublimity of *his* soul soared to a celestial height, above the gross intellectual atmosphere of his time; yet from its necessary intermixture with it, it sometimes caught the infecting tinge of its dusky vapours. The scholastick pride of uncivilized learning sometimes damped that heavenly fire which before had heated the lips of Isaiah. A display of remote reading, and of deep science, sometimes loaded the muse's wing; which was still more heavily, but rarely depressed with the theological, and casuistical lumber; with the school-divinity of Calvin, and Aquinas. *These* faults (I mention them without regret; do the specks of the sun injure the brightness, and grandeur of our first luminary?)—these faults, it must be owned, violate that perspicuity, and improperly interfere with those superiour, and interesting objects, with which true poetry, in its uninterrupted, and noble march, should bear the mind of the reader along with it, in an unobstructed, ardent, and delightful strain. Yet these faults have no affinity to the powerful and exalting; to

the occult, but sublime *cabala*, or rather *vocabulary* of Dr. Gregory.

But I shall now proceed to decisive proofs : as I will never be determined by the notions, and assertions of others, I shall always wish to establish my own assertions, my own arguments, with all the demonstration that I can give them. It is the singular privilege of true, and great genius, “to *make* the excellence “which it does not *find* ;”—to rise above the coarseness, and vulgarity of its age ; and to form a style of language, and versification. Thus the divine Pope improved, enriched, decorated, and beautified the affluent inheritance which was bequeathed to him by his august father, Dryden ; and thus Milton, and Shakespeare, each of them directed by his particular genius, mounted to regions of the muses, unknown before, I will not say, to English, but to the poetical adventurers of *any* nation. From those fertile, and unmeasurable domains of fancy, they brought down a new variety of poetical imagery, of captivating forms, and majestic motion ; clad in easy, and flowing robes, that beamed with the undulating

light; with the vivid purple of the skies. Did Milton, or Shakespeare ever feel a poverty of soul that obliged them to substitute lifeless words for animated ideas? On the contrary, in the general, and predominant strain of their poetry, their words are always subservient, but easily, and happily subservient, to their ideas. In all the *interesting* dialogue of Shakespeare (and surely his *uninteresting* dialogue is, comparatively, of very small, and trivial extent) an easy, and perspicuous, yet rich, various, and expressive style prevails, that would do honour to an age which had attained the perfection of real elegance, and refinement. If this species of lightning from Heaven, which, in a moment, subdues, but without destroying, had not been endowed with this facility, with this rapidity to strike, how could it so often have electrified the world, even when the *soul* of *Shakespeare* spoke from the *soul* of *Garrick*?

It is with Milton as it is with Shakespeare. When he writes from the unprejudiced, and unencumbered powers; from the free, and irresistible fire of his own mind (I speak of the general current

of his poetry) his language corresponds with his images, and emotions. The natural grace of simplicity adorns, and dignifies the majesty of the poet; the flexibility, and elasticity of ease impell, and accelerate his force. To prove that this is a true description of Milton's poetical character, I might make numerous, and decisive appeals; it is proved by those compositions of our unrivalled poet which have contributed most to his well-merited celebrity. His *Comus*, his *Allegro*, and his *Il Penseroso*; all the most distinguished passages of his *Paradise Lost*; the speech of Satan on taking possession of his infernal empire; the unfurling of his imperial ensign by the cherub Azazel; his encounter with death, at the gates of Pandæmonium; his address to the sun; indeed all the speeches of this diabolical hero; the poet's beautiful elegy on his own blindness, at the beginning of the third; and his almost equally beautiful invocation of *Urania*, at the beginning of the seventh book; the magnificent description of the first orient sun, and moon; and of the other heavenly luminaries, immediately after



the completion of the work of the creation ; all *these* masterly, and divine passages evince *that* unaffected, and perspicuous energy, into which I wish to vindicate him, from the blunderers, and manglers of his high poetical reputation. Thus the practice of Milton refutes the Gregorian theory ; he attains the beautiful ; he ascends to the sublime, by his own native, and simple grace, and majesty ; and where false criticism thinks that he is most in need of its meretricious dawblings, he disdains them most. For all the celebrated passages to which I have just referred, are perfectly, intelligible, and clear to readers of a *common* education ; and yet they have the attick perfection of uniting elegance with ease. I wish that Dr. Gregory, instead of sporting an absurd theory, would prevail with some of our poetasters to emulate, or imitate the prevailing poetical language of Milton ; as clear as it is forcible : as simple as it is sublime : they would then despise that affected, and distorted style, of which they are, at present, so ridiculously ambitious ; and they might possibly acquire our classical, and best manner

of writing. But I am forgetting myself; I am falling into one of Dr. Gregory's capital errors; I am for tearing *body* from *soul*: it is the *spirit* of Milton that informs the style of Milton.

Dr. Gregory, partly perhaps, from a weak, and implicit faith in the Stagyrte of England, imagined that Milton, to obtain, or improve the sublime, had recourse to a constrained, and obsolete phraseology. Many of Dr. Johnson's criticisms on Milton, are as absurd, as they are prejudiced, and illiberal. He not only charges him with his *own* stiffness, and pedantry of style, but with an absolute confusion of language; with a kind of Babylonish dialect. If Dr. Johnson would have submitted his pertinacity of opinion to a cure, by a simple, but powerful intellectual prescription; a serious, and dispassionate review of the poetry of Milton might have produced that good effect. If he had been modestly, and duly conscious of his scholastick barbarisms; or, to adopt *his* language, of his own superfetations of style; he would not have fabricated a deformed structure of words for Milton; he would not have

sent a genius to the tower of Babel, who was infinitely *his* superiour, in the temple of Apollo. Fortunate, and happy will be the poet, who, without servile imitation; who, from the force of nature, shall approach to the poetical manner of Milton; and the writer who shall be ambitious to excell in easy, luminous, and energetick prose, will be distinguishing, and prudent, if he carefully avoids the prominent asperities; the literary rocks of Johnson.

Literary, and poetical objects are deeply impressed in my heart; therefore I wish not to skim, but diligently to discuss their important topicks. The imaginary force which Dr. Gregory gives to antiquated words, principally respects our English poets; yet what I have advanced, I may support, and enforce, by the example of Homer. There never was more simplicity, I mean, more clearness, and ease of expression, than we find in *his* sublimest, and most admired passages; which, I doubt not, were recited with an equal familiarity, and delight, by the peasants, and by the princes of his country. A good greek scholar can read no greek authour with less difficulty than

Homer; the uninterruptedly, and obviously intelligible; the perspicuous, and the flowing; the chaste ornaments of a happy facility, are essential characteristics of *his* poetry. It may be objected to the present extent of my argument, that in the early, and simple age of Homer, he had no range of deserted language, to supply him with this variegated style; with this party-coloured patch-work of words, which, by startling the reader, is to pass with him, for the sublime. It may be said that this quality had not yet attained all its external, and verbal; but supreme, and complete excellence. I will readily allow that the true perfection of poetical composition was far from being attained in the time of Homer; that it was far from being attained by Homer himself; I will allow that a heterogeneous diversity of reading; the foundation of this artificial, and spurious poetical grandeur, was not accessible to *him*, as it is to modern writers:—I will allow, that to effect this meretricious grandeur, he could not, among his contemporaries, avail himself of that unnatural, and ridiculous affectation which constitutes the whole cha-



racter, of the poetasters of *our* times : impertinent pretenders ! to whose presumptuous, and profane invocation, the muses scorn to be propitious ; whom they bless not with their smiles, and graces of favour, and inspiration ; but infatuate with their grimaces, and distortions, of resentment, and contempt. I come now to the plain, and indisputable inference which I draw, from introducing Homer, to corroborate, and evince my argument. To question the sublimity of Homer, would be a critical impiety against the father of poetry ; it would be to insult a long successive series of the sentiments of mankind. Hence it follows, that the most unaffected, easy, and flowing language ; the language with which the countrymen of the poet is best acquainted, as it was the first, is always the most proper organ of poetical thoughts, in any age, or nation. It is peculiarly adapted to the sublime ; it favours its ascent to Heaven. The waving, and translucent robe auspiciously floats on the soaring spirit. Thus the agility, and prowess of the intrepid soldier are best displayed in

light armour ; and thus the rays of the god of poets dart directly, vigorously, and brightly, through serene æther ; while they are weakened, refracted, and obscured, in a heavy atmosphere.

“ Of the pieces,” says Dr. Gregory, “ which are confessedly his own, we must undoubtedly assign the preference to those of the satirical class.” Then we shall undoubtedly give a mistaken preference. I might accumulate instances, if I *would*, to disprove this assertion. But a few will be sufficient. His address to Miss Bush of Bristol, on his intended voyage to the coast of Africa ; his African dialogues, notwithstanding the contempt which they have incurred from his austere literary censor, Bryant ; but above all, his elegy to the memory of Mr. Thomas Phillips of Fairford, are far more strongly animated with the poetical spirit than any of his satirical productions. *That* elegy is eminently, and amiably distinguished by all the tenderness of friendship ; it shows an extremely susceptible, and feeling heart ; which deserved a treatment very different from that which it suffered from the insensibility of the

world. It showed that his mind was more agreeably engaged in amicable tribute than in poignant satire. In that elegy, the personifications of autumn, winter, and fancy; their characteristicks, and appendages, excell any imagery of the kind that is to be found in Spenser; and are only equalled by Milton. They proclaimed the elegant, and creative imagination, which was the authour of Rowley; but which, with all its Promethean heat, could not dispell the fog that environed the pericranium of Bryant, and of Milles.

“In most of his serious writings” (continues the Doctor) “there is little that indicates their being composed with *a full relish*; when he is satirical, his soul glows in his composition.”—I have already spoken to the distinguished glow of soul which is here foolishly attributed to his satirical compositions. As to *the full relish*, in which his serious writings are unfortunately deficient, in Dr. Gregory’s exquisitely discriminating palate; I do not allow their inferiority; I do not apprehend the idea; and I very much dislike the epicurean, and disgusting metaphor. On account, therefore, of its

gross misapplication, I send it back to the Doctor, and to his vintner; or let it be the favourite expression of the descendants of Quixote's Sancho; of the superlative, and infallible judgements of whose ancestors, in the qualities of wine; and of their inconceivably nice discernment of every atom of injury which it might suffer from other substances, an unparalleled account is given by Sancho himself, in the immortal work of Cervantes.

The 79th page of Dr. Gregory's *Life of Chatterton* contains the following extraordinary observations.—“To write well  
 “in prose, is perhaps more the effect of  
 “art, of study, and of habit, than of natural genius. The rules of metrical  
 “composition are fewer, more simple,  
 “and require a less constant exercise of  
 “the judgement. In the infancy of societies as well as of individuals, therefore, the art of poetry is antecedent to  
 “those of rhetorick, and criticism; and  
 “arrives at perfection long before the  
 “language of prose attains that degree of  
 “strength, conciseness, and harmony,  
 “which is requisite to satisfy a delicate  
 “ear.”—In my observations on the life,



writings, and character of Chatterton, I have often given a particular attention to weak, and futile criticism, and censure; for a reason which, I hope, is *not* insignificant. This feeble criticism, and censure, may suggest the language of common sense, on interesting topics; and these objects will always deserve our serious recollection, and consideration. With *this* view, I shall now beg leave to animadvert on the passage which I have quoted from Dr. Gregory.

If I adopted *his* idea, that the art of writing good poetry was sooner brought to perfection than that of writing good prose, the inference that I should draw from these premises would be the Doctor's mode of reasoning inverted. I should infer, that of the two arts, to write prose well, was the more arduous, and rare; and therefore, that it demanded greater, and more extraordinary powers of the mind. I am, however of a contrary opinion: I think, with deference to better judgements, that true poetry requires a soul of a stronger, yet finer make; of more energy, and delicacy, than classical prose. Hence the poet must be a rarer

being than the writer who is eloquent in prose. This opinion, and the deduction from it, are warranted, I may say, confirmed, by the literary history of the world. In the progressive civilization of celebrated states, far fewer authours have extended their fame in poetry than in prose. This truth will appear most evidently, if we take a view of any celebrated people, when they have arrived at the maturity of all their *true* politeness : for *then* the greatest number of authours give us room for the fairest comparative calculation ; as *then* the spirit of emulation most powerfully calls forth all the various intellectual exertions. In the best days of Greece, of Rome, and of\* England, how few were their great poets, in proportion to their great writers in prose ! Therefore the *real* improvements in poetry ; those improvements which unite the judicious, and the elegant with the spirited, the original, and the

\* I cannot make any remarks on *French* poets ; for I should thank *true taste*, if it would tell me *who they are*. The nation want vigorous, and noble sentiment ; and their language is neither flowing, nor energetick : how, then, should they have even an adequate *idea* of poetry ?

sublime; must have been, at least as gradual as those of the latter species of composition. I say *real* improvements; because imaginary improvements, and imaginary perfection have been transmitted down to us, from age to age; and we have implicitly embraced the phantoms. To pay *no* deference to long prescription, would be bold, and arrogant; but surely the free, and ingenuous mind may candidly, but without reserve, express its dissent from it; when to the most impartial inquiries; to the most accurate views of that mind, this prescription is totally repugnant. A poetical creed has, for almost three thousand years, been obtruded on the world; and like other creeds, with a peremptory despotism over the mind;—a creed which I think hard of belief, to the manly, and independent exercise of reason. We have been so long taught to believe, that in the very infancy of Grecian literature, Homer, without precedent, without any example of the lowest degree of poetical refinement, formed, I may say, created, the perfection of poetry; and of *epick* poetry; by the untutored force of his

own genius. But nature, and common sense ; (those abolishers of much clumsy magick, if our freedom from prejudice deserves their interposition)—have always told me, that in the poems of Homer, the grossest, and most disgusting absurdities are blended with a simplicity ; with an eloquence ; with a fire ; that will always be the objects of our admiration ; that will live for ever. As we have been accustomed to view those absurdities with a superstitious veneration ; nay, to admire them, as the standards of taste ; I speak of them, *absolutely* ; as they are *in themselves* ; *relatively* to the unpolished times in which they were produced, they deserve the greatest indulgence. I write thus freely ; but with reverence to respectable criticks ; to show, that the perfection of poetry, by far the first of the fine arts, could never be attained, at *once*, by *any* mortal ; it is the effect of progressive improvements, through a long course of ages ; it is the effect of “ study, and “ art, and habit,” (to use Dr. Gregory’s words) as well as the perfection of prose. But with all these advantages, both excellences must have a rare *mental* source



in their respective authours ; a luminous, comprehensive, elegant, and ardent mind, by nature. Without *this* animating, *this* invigorating principle, we may study, and labour, and write, in either province, all our lives, in vain ; as is demonstrated by numerous, and unfortunate examples. Let us not, therefore, talk of writing prose, or poetry, *well* ; let us talk of writing them *excellently* : we shall then have a substantial, and splendid object, for the critical eye ; and if my present observations have any force, their force will be the more sensibly felt. I do not think myself obliged implicitly to acquiesce in the *Αυτος Εφη* of Aristotle ; who absurdly founded his rules for epick poetry on the authority of Homer ; who had limited himself by no rules ; and whose beauties and sublimities were shaded with great faults. Besides, what could be more absurd than to insist that an epick poem should be modelled, and conducted by *one* general plan ? Why might not every great poet who was devoted to the epick muse, vary his plan ; his machinery ; his episodes, and his incidents ;—in short, the ground-work, and the structure of

his fable, and of its concomitant objects, agreeably to the infinite diversity of the powers, and operations of the human mind?

My opinion of Homer is not shaken even by Mr. Pope's unqualified eulogy on that venerable poet. Prejudices long established, and sanctioned by the most respectable authorities, will influence the greatest minds; and *he* must inevitably have entertained a warm partiality for that original, and ardent poetry, which had, for several years, inspired, and actuated his own muse. Epick, like other kinds of poetry; like other kinds of literary composition, in reciprocally distant ages, received eminent improvements from great masters. Virgil improved on Homer; and Milton on Virgil; the English poet soared to heights which no bold adventurer had hitherto explored. Nor did he owe his astonishing superiority merely to the wonders of revelation; he improved on several admired passages of the other two poets; he excelled their spirit of fire; he excelled their powers of invention. With regard to *them*;—the eclogues, and georgicks, and the six first

books of the *Æneid*, gave me more pleasure than I received both from the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*. I am ingenuously speaking my own sentiments; which I am far from communicating as a decisive authority to others. I shall here remind you of the unfinished verses which were left by Virgil, in his *Æneid*; and of his orders when he was dying, that the divine poem should be committed to the flames. I suppose it will be allowed that Virgil was a good judge of what constituted, and completed the form of poetry; consequently his taste was as delicate as his imagination was warm: did *he* think that excellent poetry could be written, any more than excellent prose, without *study*, and *art*, and *habit*, strengthening, enriching, and refining the poetical talent? Or did he think that perfect poetry was the rhapsodies; the wild effusions of a barbarous age?

Similar, and analogous were the striking improvements in prose. It would be prolix, and tedious minutely to demonstrate an evident truth. Cicero improved on Plato, and Demosthenes; Cæsar on Xenophon; and *Livy*, the first of

historians, on Herodotus, and Thucydides. *These* great men as emulously, and conspicuously surpassed their remoter literary ancestors, as they took the palm from their immediate predecessours; as eminently, and conspicuously as the prose of Dryden excelled that of Sir Philip Sydney, and of Ben Jonson; or as David Hume excelled Burnet; nay even Clarendon, in the historick page.

I beg that it may be remembered that I never mean to separate the style, or manner of writing, from the fine ethereal principle from which it springs; and that it seems to *me* indisputable that all the progressive improvements in the different modes of composition, necessarily flow from the gradual, general, and collateral improvements of the human mind; and from its particular, and personal constitution; with which they are intimately, with which they are indissolubly connected. Shall we then ridiculously imagine that the prose of Addison, of Bolingbroke, and of Burke, were acquired merely by *study*; by *art*, and *habit*; or shall we not justly conclude, that they were as much the effects of ge-



nius, as the poetry of Milton, of Dryden, and of Pope ?

It is as absurd to suppose that the early world would be more apt to write in verse than in prose, as it is to suppose that they would more readily converse in the former than in the latter strain. Man, by nature, prefers every kind of freedom to every kind of restriction ; though judicious, and salutary restrictions are necessary to accomplish every species of virtue ; every species of glory. The laws of the most ancient, and celebrated legislators, with those of Moses inclusively, a lawgiver of extreme antiquity, were written in prose. Precepts of prudence, and religion, were often, in ancient times, inculcated in verse ; *only* that they might the more easily be retained by memory. *This* kind of verse was delivered to the world, for its morality, and piety ; not for its poetical beauty. As to the infancy, or very early life of individuals, not one in a thousand boys will be so apt voluntarily to make experiments of his talents in verse as in prose ; unless nature is, in *them* perverted by the blundering example of schoolmasters ; who press all

their scholars, indiscriminately, into the service of the muses : those tyrants of the mind ; who, like the old tyrant of the body, force every mental stature to one common measure ; to a bed, not of pleasure, but of torment.

“ The rules of metrical composition” (says Dr. Gregory) “ are fewer, and more “ simple, and require a less constant exercise of the judgement” [than the rules of prose.] The diametrical contrary of *this* is the truth. But I do not like to dwell on *frivolous* matter ; I do not like to fight “ as one who beateth the air.” I shall therefore content myself with observing, that it may be very proper for merely grammatical, and technical men in writing, to proceed like joiners, and bricklayers, by rule, and line ; but that men of true talents prosecute *their* glowing work under a more free, and animating direction ; *their* liberal rules, guides, and limits, are, the magnificent exuberance, and the accurate justness of their own thoughts ; with the well retained examples of their great masters ; *not* forcibly, and rudely, but gently, and amicably impressing the forms, and ting-

ing the colours of their own minds. Unfortunate must always be the reasoning of a critick, who, through the tenour of his remarks, considers a series of language, and its producing, and efficient cause, as two distinct, and different objects ; who separates thought made visible from thought itself; from the pure intellect which presents it, in vigour, and sublimity ; in order, and in beauty, to the mental eye :—who unnaturally discriminates between mind, and its emanations ; between the light, and the essence of the soul.

I have always as explicitly shown my unaffected, and ardent zeal for distinguished, and original genius as I have expressed my strong dislike of unwarrantable, and obtrusive presumption. Agreeably to this confirmed, and invincible habit, (who, indeed, that feels its independent, and lively pleasure would wish to conquer it?) I think myself obliged to take notice of a strange passage in Dr. Gregory's book, in which, with an equal extreme of boldness, and absurdity, he forces into a congeniality; into a similarity : into an equality of greatness, two

men whom nature formed as remote, in mind, as the poles are, in matter, from each other : he mentions together, placing them in intellectual apposition ; blending them into a union of excellence ; —“ the abilities of a *Newton*, and a *Bryant* !” If the transcendent heroes in literature, and in science, are *thus* to be dragged down, and confounded with the vulgar ; what will become of their posthumous, and immortal glory ? It is easy to account for the injustice which great men suffer while they live : but *that* injustice is commonly redressed when death has removed them from the jaundiced eye of envy. But it has been particularly reserved for *these* times, in which our confidence is as remarkable as our vitiated, and contemptible taste, not only to dispute, but to vilify the splendid fame of several of our greatest men, who had been long, and justly celebrated for various kinds of mental pre-eminence\*. To

\* The impudent stupidity, and intellectual blasphemy of *this* comparison is only equalled, or exceeded by a passage in the Abbé Raynal ; who, though he assumes the august province of a legislator to mankind, is, I think, the most disingenuous,



compare a Newton with a Bryant, is to compare a vigorous, original, and divine, with a weak, pedantick, and frivolous mind. Have a care, Dr. Gregory; clergyman that you *are*, you have, by this comparison, been guilty (perhaps unawares) of intellectual sacrilege. Inadvertently; or with a ridiculous perverseness of opinion; or with a prostituted flattery, you have incurred the profaneness of an ignorant, and irreverent French coxcomb; who, at this time, throws his contempt on the memory of Newton, with all the superficial impertinence of his country; with all the disdain of Gallick insolence.

Chatterton, in a letter of the 8th of July, 1770; a very short time before his death, mentions different kinds of presents which he was then sending to his relations.

partial, vain, inconsistent, and declamatory writer that I ever read.

“If one man alone” (says this extraordinary estimator of human excellence) “had been the inventor of the manufacture for figured stuffs, he would have displayed more intelligence than Leibnitz or Newton.”—History of the European Settlements, &c. B. XIXth Justamond’s Translation.

Among those presents were two fans :  
 “ the silver one, he says, is *more graver*  
 “ than the other ; which would suit my  
 sister best.”—Dr. Gregory observes that  
 this expression of *more graver* “ confirms  
 “ Mr. Bryant’s opinion, that he was not  
 “ well grounded in the first principles of  
 “ grammar.”—Gregory ; p. 259. — This  
 is a truly pitiable absurdity. How could  
 your partiality to the trifling pedantry of  
 Mr. Bryant make you forget that Chat-  
 terton was evidently a master, not only  
 in grammatical, but in spirited, and ele-  
 gant writing ; and that he might have  
 been a model for inferiour authours ; if  
 he had not been beyond their apprehen-  
 sion, and emulation ? His prose is as  
 free, and eloquent as his poetry. If you  
 had not been blinded by grammatical  
 mechanism, you must have seen that *the*  
*more graver* was an ironical expression ;  
 a verbal jest, on the common, well-  
 known, and barbarous idiom of the vul-  
 gar. It is highly probable that his sister  
 used this double, and anomalous compara-  
 tive, in conversation ; and I have no doubt  
 that, in his letter, he affixed a particular  
 mark, with his pen, to the solecism.

That the natives of England should study their own language grammatically, is a good general rule ; a rule that should not be slighted by men of the brightest talents. But men of such talents often prefer to this formal, yet respectable, study, the instruction which they gain from a more lively, and impressive analogy ; from their careful, and constant attention to the examples of our best authors : and *these* men will not merely connect their periods with a complete grammatical precision ; they will enrich them with all the copiousness ; they will adorn them with all the graces of our language. He must be well acquainted with the vestibule of a temple who daily waves aromattick incense before its altar. What the little mind comprehends with a microscopick limitation ; or surmounts with the tardy progress of an opossum ; the great mind seizes with a quick, and comprehensive intuition ; or attains by a few gigantick steps. It may be proper, and prudent, in *you*, Dr. Gregory, deliberately, and gravely to consult with Priscian : while you meditate, and achieve your literary exploits. When we

cannot make heroick sallies, we should be careful to move in a compact, and secure order. But the spontaneous acquirements, and the excursive genius of a Chatterton, supersede these phlegmatick precautions. The regular army of words are at *his* command; not only in their mechanical combination, but in their accurate, and happy arrangement; in their perfect symmetry, strength, and beauty. The style; the phalanx of this literary general; of this great Frederick, under the auspices of the milder Minerva, moves not with the unwieldy slowness of the *Dutch*, but with the ease, and velocity of the *Prussian* troops. His progress is as ardent, and unbounded as his ambition; at the head of his rapid, and irresistible forces; of his *επεα πτερόεντα*, to whatever quarter he directs his march, he pervades, and conquers; their discipline, their spirit, and their vigour, always, decide the victory.

The observations of one of Dr. Gregory's learned, and respectable friends, of which he is pleased to make some notes to his book, with the signature, O; and which *he* calls an able vindication of Mr.



Walpole, are disingenuous, and truly contemptible. The vulgar sophistry with which those observations abound, I have already condescended to answer; and I hope that it has been refuted. I shall only take notice of one evident falsehood with which they are stigmatized by their authour; as it evinces the heart with which he wrote his vindication of this *uncommon* peer; for I so highly respect the character of several of our English nobility, that, in justice to *them*, I apply this epithet to the late Lord Orford. And here I totally differ from the accommodating Dr. Gregory; who, in his laboured, but feeble palliation of the conduct of that *titular* nobleman, seems to refuse all humane sentiment, and its concomitant liberality of manners, to persons in high life; when he endeavours to vindicate the hypocritical, unfeeling, and disdainful rejection of the reasonable, modest, and humble request of Chatterton.—The Doctor's learned, and respectable friend is guilty (as I have observed) of a notorious falsehood;—he tells us that “Mr. Walpole could not help concluding that *the whole*” [all that Chat-

terton had communicated to him] “ was a  
 “ fiction, contrived by some one or more  
 “ literary wags, who wished to impose on  
 “ his credulity, and to laugh at him, if  
 “ they succeeded; and that Chatterton  
 “ was only the instrument employed to  
 “ introduce, and recommend these old  
 “ writings.”—Gregory ; p. 63.—The re-  
 verse of *this* bold assertion is the truth.  
 Mr. Walpole, in the defence which he  
 wrote of himself, repeatedly declares that  
 he had no doubt that Chatterton was the  
 real authour of the poetical specimens  
 which he had sent to him: and from  
 that certainty, he repeatedly mentions  
 his genius in terms of the highest admira-  
 tion; though in *other* places, with an  
 incongruity which disgraces him, and  
 which often betrays the deepest dissimu-  
 lation, he professes a cold, and stupid in-  
 difference, both to Chatterton, and his  
 poetry. It has happened that assassins in  
 the dark have stabbed their friend instead  
 of their devoted victim. This learned,  
 and respectable vindicator should have  
 carefully suppressed the verses that he  
 quotes; which contain, on every account,  
 a most unmerited compliment from the

young poet to *Walpole's mental taste*. The moral magnanimity of this youth must have been as prodigious as his poetical genius. The compliment of Cicero to Cæsar, that “he forgot nothing but “injuries,”—was far more applicable to Chatterton. I am sorry from my heart, that he threw his pearls before a being, which, when it had received such an offering before, “had turned again, and “rent him.” Indeed, in more senses than one, the little elegant encomium was prostituted. After the previous treatment (which was so far from being expiated that it was industriously aggravated) it was an extravagant hyperbole of forgiveness:—it was as extravagant a hyperbole of praise; for the *reverse* of taste is the true literary character of Mr. Walpole: his thoughts are always feeble; and they are always expressed in a vulgar, and uncouth style.

A train of singular, and melancholy circumstances, which do great discredit to human nature, attended the fate of the works of this young man, as well as of himself. Editions of Rowley, and of the *Miscellanies*, were published after

Chatterton's death ; yet the editors took not the least liberal notice of his poor relations. This very shameful omission may seem surprizing to those who have not observed that we often act as if we thought that it was not incumbent on us to practise any delicacy ; any honesty, to the unfortunate ; when we may safely violate a moral regard to these virtues. The cold, timid, pusillanimously proud, and *conscious* Walpole, could not give them his own example of this liberality ; for he would have felt it a self-condemnation of his former conduct. The publishers of those works owed nothing to the surviving friends of the poet, from the obligations of common law, or upon any act of parliament : but as they made them their property, without making any recompence to his necessitous friends, they were guilty of literary piracy ;—by an act which was passed when man was created ; and was copied into his breast by the finger of the Almighty.

I wish that the world would give me fewer occasions of censure than of praise. With what pleasure must a friend of humanity pay his tribute of honest fame to



Mr. Croft! I had the honour to meet that gentleman, at the house of a very celebrated man, many years ago; before a bleak world had blighted the flowery spells of fancy; while a rich flow of youthful spirits was a substitute for fortune; while “the bubble joy laughed in “the cup of folly.” — This gentleman embalmed the memory of Chatterton with the aromattick praise which it deserved, and with his christian compassion; and *he* alone of the learned (who ought to be most eminently generous) extended his practical benevolence to his relations. His sister, in a letter to Mr. Croft, assures him that “the only benefit “that her mother, and she had reaped “*from the labours of her dear brother,* “were what they had received from “*him.*”

I have only to regret that this worthy, and virtuous clergyman should have sunk, in *one* instance, to the stern, and bigoted priest. He says that Chatterton “threw “himself on *the anger* of his Creator.” I hope that *some* suicides will find *that* mercy from the perfection of goodness which criminal man denies them. But

whatever may be their future fate, let us take every opportunity to vindicate the Deity from vile *human* passions. I honestly, and independently regret that pictures of him, with these passions make a considerable part of the service of *our* church: they certainly have bad effects on the minds, and manners of men; for the ignorant either *cannot*, or *will* not be taught to make the proper distinction between metaphor, and simile, and *real, abstracted truth*. Let these daring misrepresentations of the Almighty always be confined to the violence of oriental hyperbole. God must be, in his nature, and in his action, equal, uniform, and impassive: the diffusion of his mercy is without weak emotion; the exercise of his power is without painful resentment: —*God cannot be angry.*

Mr. Hamilton, a very wealthy printer, and the principal proprietor of the Town and Country Magazine; a notorious vehicle of scandal, and falsehood, was one of the persons from whose interested flattery, and promises of the most liberal encouragement, Chatterton had fondly anticipated great literary success in the

metropolis. It was *my* misfortune to know the man ; I wrote for him, at the time to which I refer, in the Critical Review ; and I can with rigorous truth, assert, that from the older Tonson, down to Osborne, there never was a more hard-hearted, overbearing, and insolent fellow. It is needless for me to suppose what his treatment of the unprotected youth would be, when his pale fortune was in its paler wane ; and how probably that treatment would accelerate his fate. I am now giving anecdotes of the year 1770. Since the melancholy history of my young poet occupied my mind, I well remember frequently to have heard the name of Chatterton announced aloud, in Hamilton's house, to the corrector of the press. I doubt not that we have sometimes passed each other, in the court in Fleet-Street, where Hamilton lived ; it was Falcon Court ; its name, and the figure of the bird at its entrance, were emblematical ; for it was inhabited by a vulture. Like our great lexicographer, I was, then, always “ providing for the day that was “ passing over me : ” — yet my circumstances were almost as much better than

Chatterton's as his genius was superiour to mine. If I had known his distresses, I should certainly have relieved them; and perhaps even in consequence of *my* puny aid, the youth who only lived for glory, might have been living with glory, still. A heart affluent in humanity, however circumscribed in power, might have afforded to give him more assistance than he could obtain from the *poor* patronage of Walpole; for *this* idea the crocodile gives us of his external ability to do good.



## LECTURE XVIII.

### CHATTERTON.

DR. JOHNSON had made many inquiries into the character, and fate of Chatterton : he communicated to me the following deplorable circumstances, immediately previous to his tragical death. To a person who kept a chandler's shop in Fetter-Lane, which is not far from Brook-Street in Holborne, where he lodged, he owed 3s. 6d. for quartern loaves. His only sustenance, then, was, literally, bread, and water. He had bought his loaves very stale, that they might last the longer. On his asking for another loaf, the mistress of the shop refused it ; with the habitual reason of people of *her* class ; that “ she could not afford to give credit.” —The world had now harrassed him out, with a complete climax of evils ; and he

left it ; not, as I am convinced, in a fit of impotent rage ; as we are told by the stupid flatterers of a selfish insensibility ; but on the decision of a deliberate despair, (which will always be deeply regretted by humane, and enlightened minds ;) yet with such exquisite, and heart-transfixing feelings, as by those minds (especially if they have suffered a cruel adversity) can more easily be conceived than expressed.

My memory here fails me; but the short, and emphatical description is the interesting particular; it is not material from what person it came. Dr. Johnson farther told me, that in his conversation, either with Mrs. Ballance, a relation of Chatterton, who had been a lodger with him at Mr. Walmsley's, in Shore-ditch; or with Mrs. Angel, in whose house he lodged, and died, in Brook-Street;—he asked her, “ what seemed to be the pre-  
 “ dominant disposition ; and what was  
 “ the common behaviour of the unfortu-  
 “ nate youth ? ”—She replied, that “ he  
 “ was as proud as Lucifer; but that it was  
 “ *impossible* not to love him.”—If I had been able effectually to protect extraor-

dinary, and neglected merit ; and if I had been endowed with a generous heart ; I should gladly have *accepted this omen*. What puritanical, and affected humility may say, I care not :—*this* was the youth *for me* ; *this* was the stem on which we might have grafted, *not* the sneaking, and safe qualities, which are most acceptable to a magisterial world ; but the independent ; the generous ; the noble virtues ! What an honour was missed by the lilliputian soul of Walpole ! If Chatterton had lived, the moral expansion of his mind would have been as vast, and unbounded, as his genius.

A lover of human greatness, independent of its trappings, dwells with a lively pleasure ; with a degree of rapture, on this phænomenon. At an age when others are children in mind, and actions, as in years, *his* thoughts, and *his* behaviour were those of a man. It was, indeed, marked with those peculiarities which are unavoidable when the soul is under the rapturous dominion of its genius ;—those peculiarities which fools call pride ; and which doting antiquarians call insanity. The dainties of which boys are particular-

ly fond, *he* despised ; he was eager only for intellectual food. The young pupil of Minerva was old in stoical discipline ; in exhilarating temperance ; he would not suffer gross obstructions to check the energy of his mind. But he who deserves fame can descend as well as soar ; can invigorate the excursions of fancy with scholastick toils, for the accomplishment of glory. While this young Hercules of mental vigour, wrote with equal force on modern subjects, and in modern language, both in verse, and prose ; by his patient, and deep researches into our ancient history, and ancient customs ; and by his great proficiency in our old English, he would have been a prodigy, without his original, and sublime endowments. But to these inferiour acquirements he gave not a supreme dignity, with a pedantick, and antiquarian absurdity ; he made them the vehicles, or the concomitants ; *not* the essence, or the authours of his fame. As he was ambitious of our first honours, he was avaricious of time ; the hours that were lost in mechanical, verbal, and base drudgery, he carefully, and vigilantly redeemed ; what



was retrenched from the flaming influence of Apollo, was recovered under the mild, and tranquil reign of his beautiful sister; who, from the plenitude of her orb, illumined his mind with a poetical, and meridian day. His growing virtues, not less than his talents made his death a deplorable event; of both, indeed, he was equally tenacious, when adversity was contracting her last, and severest frown: at *that* alarming juncture, the immediate exertions of his poetical talents were hallowed by the pious offices of the son; and by the affectionate attention of the brother. It was almost impossible for him to live longer; his nature was far exalted *above* the *common* scale of mortals; *below* it they were strenuous to sink him; the pressure was violent, intolerable, and destructive; it broke the spring of his existence. I hope that his name will be singularly auspicious in the annals of English literature; and I likewise hope that the foes, and persecutors of his life, and the traducers of his memory, will be branded with eternal infamy; for the sake of moral justice, and of the benevolent, and great virtues; for the sake of

unparalleled genius, and of practical christianity.

Mr. Bryant, in a passage of that book to which I have often referred, seems to applaud himself, after having insulted the memory of Chatterton with every indignity; after having treated it with all possible contempt. He seems highly pleased with his injustice, and cruelty; which had attempted to tear the wreath of glory from unfortunate, but exalted genius; and to fix it on a fantastick being; the creature of his own wild, and uncultivated imagination. His expressions, on that occasion, I shall beg leave to apply to myself; and I hope, on a stronger foundation, and with a better grace.—“There is a very great satisfaction in doing justice to departed merit; and in restoring those honours which have been unjustly awarded.”—Bryant, p. 505.

I have here offered you a sketch (I am sensible that it is very imperfect, and inadequate) of a character which will not soon appear again; amidst all that variety which the contemplation of man affords, from the infinite diversity of his

original dispositions, and of his pursuits, and situations. Before I come to the end of my Lectures ; and before I gratefully take my leave of this audience, I must say something ; or I must recapitulate what I *have* said, of *another* extraordinary person ; as he hath necessarily been, to *me*, a very important object, in the course of my observations. His learning ; his talents ; his penetrating, and comprehensive mind ; — his eloquence ; the happily instinctive, and implicit veneration which we pay to age ; but above all these pretensions, his fortune, which was, at length, comparatively good ; and which recommends us more to the favour of the world than our inherent, and indeprivable titles to publick esteem ;—*this* aggregate of auspicious qualities, and circumstances, gave him all that consequence which his presumptuous, and despotick pride demanded. In the natural constitution, however, of intellectual abilities, he was extremely inferiour to Chatterton. I shall not make *one* part of his character absolutely *in-compatible* ; though it may be strangely *inconsistent* with *another* : I will not give

provoking instances of his barbarous insolence in social life ; and afterwards propose him to the world, as a model ; as a paragon of christian excellence : I will not hold forth a picture that will be absolutely unintelligible, to moral disquisition. Of *such* monstrous caricatures, I have always left his weak, and treacherous ; at least, certainly, his very *injurious* friends, in unenvied, and full possession.

The celebrated Dr. Johnson was a learned man ; but his learning was far from being accurate, and masterly ; how, indeed, could it deserve that praise ; as he had but incompletely read (so he himself, to my surprize, acknowledged to me) several of those capital authours who deserve our most attentive perusal ? And this unwarrantable habit had so foolish an effect on him, that he perversely imagined (as I have likewise heard him insist) that all other scholars read in the same slovenly manner.—Indeed in this great man, amongst his other uncommon inconsistencies (for we are all, more, or less, inconsistent) long series of application, and indolence ; of a collected, and dissi-



pated mind, were alternately contrasted. Yet this incongruity may be a concomitant of genius ; it may partly proceed from the different action of externals on great sensibility. In prose, as in verse, he was eloquent, vigorous, and splendid ; but he was deficient in ease ; in flow ; in the pure, transparent, and gliding stream of attick elegance. He had the majesty (too often the *affected* majesty) of the monarch ; which he could not soften, and endear with the affable, and polite manner of the gentleman. We are apt to be in extremes : Johnson was absorbed in substantial, yet discursive thought ; and Chesterfield sacrificed *only* to the graces. Necessarily congenial with his mode of thinking was the body, and colour of his style ; the frame, and complexion of his incorporated thoughts. It kept a stately march in the panoply of learning ; for it was animated by a soul of unbending dignity ; while the style of Addison flowed in a finer, and more harmonious current ; while the language of Burke was accelerated with the more intense ardour ; and spangled with the more effulgent rays of a most vivid ima-

gination. In justice to him, however, I must not omit the agreeable exceptions to this measured, and lordly walk : some of his productions are written with ease, and fluency ; yet without relaxing from the native strength of their authour.

His practical morality, and his religion were mixed, and inconsistent, like his literary character. His uncommon humanity, benevolence, and charity, were discredited with a dictatorial, and insolent pride, which *no* talents can warrant, or expiate : instead of arguing only to establish truth, (which ought always to have been the paramount object with a *christian* philosopher) he often disputed with extreme heat, and rudeness, for what he knew to be sophistry ; merely to extort an ignoble, indeed a very dishonourable victory. His heart melted at a tale of woe ; and he was liberal of substantial relief to the poor, and distressed ; yet this consummate hero in moral atchievements (*so* his satirical encomiasts, as I may call them, have described him) as he had not the least command of temper, would overwhelm the unfortunate with the most insulting, and mortifying lan-

guage ; if he was in a discontented humour ; or if they had expressed their dissent from his opinion, in the most respectful terms.

His religion was vitiated with impure mixtures as well as his morality. His piety was infected with a gloomy, and monastick superstition. His desponding fancy armed the Deity with terrors ; and formed the most tremendous ideas of a future state. Hence, that personal courage, which, in the vigorous days of his manhood, would have intrepidly resisted the most desperate assassin, was reversed with the fears of the old woman, whenever the invisible world was the object of his spiritual contemplation. From religious superstition, religious, and political bigotry are inseparable. He was an idolater of monarchical, and priestly tyranny ; and the idolatry which impressed a dark severity in his mind, extended its baleful influence to his writings. It not only infected his moral, but his critical compositions ; its noxious, but I hope, temporary vapour, clouded the laurels of some of our greatest men.

They, however, who know mankind, but who wish not to propagate seducing,

and dangerous errors, by painting them better than they are, have a just, and lenient apology for these prejudices, and faults; when they recollect, and consider the hereditary, and deep melancholy, with which he was frequently oppressed. We need not wonder; and we ought not indiscriminately to censure; when we find that this disorder misleads, and perverts the judgement; for it even affects the understanding. Agreeably to the mixed, and contrasted creation, and economy, with which the Supreme Being hath constituted, and governs the universe, even the powerful melancholy of which I speak, has its advantages as well as its defects. If, at *one* time it excites, in great minds, resentful prejudices, and weak apprehensions; at *another*, it produces a virtuous solemnity, an awful sublimity of thought. Indeed there can be no true, and strongly effective genius, without the love, and habit of calm, contemplative, and severe thinking; without a moral, and refined pensiveness; abstracted from the material world; and intent on the ideas of instructive reason; and on the objects of virtuous imagination. *These* affections, and habits con-



stitute that desirable, and amiable melancholy, which purifies, and exalts the faculties of the soul ; and which a thoughtless, giddy, and tumultuous world, has the folly, and the presumption, to confound with moroseness ; with madness. *These* affections, and habits disperse the light, and gay delusions of life ; and collect, and concentrate substantial, and salutary truth. By *their* stimulating impulse, the mind works, and revolves on itself ; and thus multiplies, invigorates, and brightens its operations.

As

—————“ the fixed, and noble mind

“ Turns all occurrence to its own advantage ;”

even the rigour of adversity may be favourable to mental strength ; as a keen air braces the corporeal nerves ; expells indolence ; and promotes an active, and lasting life. Genius may gain an additional, and propitious fire, from its determined, and heroick opposition to difficulties, and distress : jealous of its invaluable, indeprivable, and eternal privileges ; and conscious of their force, it may rise above a desponding languour ; it may resolve to penetrate through all its for-

midable hostilities ; and to disappoint the triumphant, and satanick smile of envy. —Spurning the jilt fortune ; eager to give *one* memorable proof more of *her* blind partiality ; and to obtain a signal victory over *her* capricious empire ; he changes the agitations of pain into the agitations of pleasure : heated with the stubborn conflict, he is the more heated with imagination : by the impetuosity with which he darts through his rude impediments, he makes more extensive conquests in the literary region than he would have gained if those impediments had not disputed his way.—Persevering labour accomplishes the objects of *dullness* ; noble passions, those of *genius*. The friendly frowns of the world exalt his natural powers with a new, and irresistible enthusiasm ; his atchievements are inspiréd by a moral, a practical, and glorious resentment. I have no doubt that Chatterton was *thus* impelled, while he struggled with circumstances most inauspicious to literature, and poetry ; while the manly boy was under the tyranny of an undistinguishing, and stupid pedagogue ;—While he copied the Norman, and Saxon jargon of Lambert ; and while he suffered

the pretended, and avaricious friendship ; the *half-faced fellowship*, of a Calcott, and a Barrett. I have no doubt that Johnson was thus impelled, in the squalid, and solitary gloom of the temple ; in his unprotected, unpensioned, unfashionable days ; which were the days of his true dignity ; of his true glory.

It is not improbable that to the blindness of Milton we owe a blessing which could only have atoned for the calamity. Shut out from the cheering, from the exhilarating view of the beautiful, and grand objects of nature ; he had recourse to the fair, and magnificent objects of his own mind. From the organick darkness proceeded a flood of immortal glory. —“ So much the rather the celestial light,  
 “ (to use his own beautiful language)  
 “ shone inward ; and irradiated the  
 “ mind, through all her powers.”

I should have observed, that if adversity is not quite oppressive, and overwhelming ; and if it meets a mind sufficiently spirited, and vigorous, to avail itself of the school of the severe disciplinarian ; it is attended with some useful, and generous effects, which are more easily obtained. Like the melancholy of



true genius ; like the philosophically pensive habit which I have endeavoured justly to describe, it prevents our faculties from being scattered on levity, and falsehood ; and keeps them collected on reflexion, and truth. It shows us the futility of our eager pursuits ; it evinces to us the unmanly character of our *common* hopes, and fears ; and thus it strengthens, and exalts the mind ; throws it into a strain of persuasive, and commanding thought ; which ensures its own independence, and self-enjoyment ; and enables it forcibly to recommend the attainment of these inestimable blessings to the world.

If I recollect rightly, I have already given you similar sentiments on these topicks ; yet I think that they may, without impropriety, be repeated, and again enforced ; as they may have useful, and salutary effects : for they tend to cool our eagerness for a daily intercourse with a vain, and selfish world ; and to redeem the misfortunes of genius ; and the melancholy hues of life which are presented to its contemplation ;—by showing it that those very misfortunes ; that those dark social, and moral shades, contribute to



independence, vigour, and sublimity of soul.

God forbid that by what I have said I should have meant any malevolence to the memory of Johnson; but I desire inflexibly, and explicitly to communicate literary truth; and to improve our acquaintance with the human mind. I see no reason why we should not mention his faults; but his excellences entitle them to our free, and ample pardon. As an authour, he claims the veneration; nay, the admiration of posterity. He, himself, atchieved, in England, an arduous work; which, in *other* countries, had long employed the united diligence, judgement, and taste of whole academies. He ascertained, and established the propriety, and elegance of the English language; he wrote some excellent poetry; he enlarged our ethical knowledge; and he illustrated, and enforced the truths of christianity.

I am now at the close of these Lectures; which have employed my attention, but not without long intervals of disagreeable, and painful interruptions, for several years. I have been inured, through a long life, to many discouragements from

literary exertion ; yet I am *not* without hopes that my perseverance will ultimately be attended with desirable effects. I principally attribute my bad success to our intolerance of explicit, and disinterested truth : but the time will come when *such* truth will be read with pleasure ; and when ingenuous freedom will procure esteem for the memory of the author. Therefore I shall be tenacious of this independence, to my death ; and of my inviolable attachment to it, I think that I have given you the evidence of demonstration. I have been solicitous, and diligent to do justice to our great poets ; and to contribute to revive a true taste for poetry ; the first of the fine arts ; an art which very powerfully tends to improve the understanding, and to meliorate the heart. For *sincerely*, and without a splenetick inclination to disparage the times in which I live, a classical taste for poetry, in England, is extremely degenerated, or rather, almost extinct ; as every unprejudiced, and good critick must allow ; when he recollects the verses which have been published ; and the encomiums which their authours have received. For my own part, I have warmly praised,

without partiality; and I have freely censured, without malevolence. *This*, perhaps, is *not* the way, universally to *please*; but I am sure that it is the way, if a man fortunately has abilities, universally to *inform*. Even wounded self-love has not been able to warp me; I have given the tribute of ardent eulogy to those by whom I have been materially injured. The generous, and the good (and those only I am addressing) will believe my assertion; and they will think that it communicates a proof of a just mind.

## LECTURE XIX.

### GRAY.

WHEN I first determined to write observations on our truly distinguished, and great English Poets, with an open impartiality, and with the best endeavours of my mind, I likewise determined to limit my views to those authours who had not only written excellently, but extensively. To this resolution, however, in the present instance, I have not adhered; and I hope that the enlargement of my plan will not be found to have been injudicious. Gray wrote but little poetry; yet he was a very great poet; and a great poet was never treated more unjustly, enviously, and malignantly, than *he* has been treated by Dr. Johnson. I wish that the late Mr. Mason, (who was himself a poet) or some other man of talents, who was honoured with his intimate acquaintance, had favoured the world with a deliberate, regular, and



spirited vindication of the true character, and glory of his departed friend. The performance of this liberal office was, indeed, almost incumbent on such a person ; it would have done great credit to the writer ; would have given additional vivacity, and strength to the cause of literature ; and would have spared inferiour efforts, and ingenuous pain to one of its ardent, though unfortunate professors.

There is a peculiarity of disposition, and of moral discipline, which, though they are not deemed provident, and safe, in the code of worldly wisdom, seem to deserve what they seldom obtain, the love, and esteem of mankind. A person who is actuated by *these* grand movers of his life, will publickly, and honestly, and ardently defend what he thinks gloriously right, reprobate what he thinks egregiously wrong, without any regard to political, or secular consequences. He will feel a generous resentment, or why not a generous indignation, which he will unreservedly express, when any species of great merit is insulted, and oppressed, by encroaching, and enormous power of *any* kind ? But he will be particularly jealous of the rights, and glory,

of the distinguished abilities of the mind. He will equally feel, with all the fine force of exquisite sensibility, the wrongs which they suffer, in himself, or others : from arbitrary, precipitate, and visionary, yet too popular, and decisive criticism ; he will diligently, and zealously, (as if it were his own cause) vindicate injured, and calumniated genius ; while, perhaps, its honours are not asserted by its bosom-friends ; whose minds are not so easily thrown into warm, and adventurous motion. Let this temper, and this habit be termed arrogance ; spleen ; ill-nature ; whatever people who are really of *that* description, may please to name them ; they will be distinguished with epithets of a very different acceptation, by the few whose manners are directed by *their* impulse ; and by the more frequent worth which can feel, and approve the disinterested, and benevolent spirit of independent minds.

I must own that the injustice, and absurdity of Johnson's crude, and invenomed strictures against Gray, have, in productions of occasional, and temporary criticism, frequently been brought forth, and sensibly, and forcibly, to publick

view. But I shall beg leave to proceed in a manner different from that in which the criticks to whom I allude, gave their sentiments on this interesting subject. They were too complaisant; they payed too profound a deference to our Stagyrte; who, in his rudeness, and iniquity to a “\* sun of glory” who had lately set (and when he *had* set, could not “please” his “envy,” nor escape his detraction) deserved no complaisance, nor deference. They were “ravished;” they were infatuated, “with the whistling of a name;” for in trifling times, there is as light, superficial, and volatile a fashion in literature, as in dress. I am far from meaning to retaliate injustice on the memory of Dr. Johnson; I am far from meaning that he owed his essential, permanent, and highly respectable importance, as an authour, to the delusive rays of fashion; that misleading, and fugitive meteor. I shall only assert, that a blind prejudice, which was ever stumbling on his authority; or, in other words, the indiscriminate fashion of admiring him, gave an

\* Oppressed, we feel the beam directly beat;

Those suns of glory please not till they set.

Pope;—Imitations of Horace; B. IId. Epistle Ist.



oracular importance to much absurdity; to much nonsense, which discredited both his writings, and his conversation. And I likewise beg leave to declare that if any man proposes laws of criticism, and composition, to me, he must enforce them with something more solid, and respectable than his mere name. I will never take nominal dogmas, and nominal influence, for strength of argument; nor for elegance of sentiment, and taste. On the contrary; on account of the overbearing weight of a name, I will, at any time, the more minutely, strenuously, and pertinaciously endeavour to expose the fallacies which it has presumed to impose on the world; from an honest zeal completely to eradicate, and explode *their* usurpation, and tyranny. While we are engaged in this fair, and honourable cause, all our attention must be absorbed in truth; we must bring disingenuous, and base actions to their proper light; we must give them their proper names; indifferent to future stings, from venal criticks; to ignorant, yet deciding jests, from literary fops; and to frowns, and fulminations from the church.

I have another objection to the censures



which I have seen of Dr. Johnson's treatment of Mr. Gray ; they were not so particularly attentive to *all* that treatment as the merit of the poet, and the authority of the critick demanded. I should not have thought it requisite ; I should not have thought it necessary, to persue the ridiculous cavils, and contemptuous insults, with which our gloomy, and supercilious critick hath endeavoured to obscure the glory of this admirable poet, in a closely connected train of inquiry, and refutation ; if the literary edicts of that critick, which are often characterized with all the inconsistency, and freaks of despotism, had not long obtained, or rather arrogantly, and violently seized an implicit assent ; a foolish, and servile veneration. If this abject submission had not ratified absurdity, the person who gives those unreasonable remarks his particular attention, must be as miserably employed as *he* was, who *made* them ; for considered in themselves, they are truly contemptible, and unworthy of the slightest notice. Hence, if several objects of this Lecture should seem to be minute, or tedious, permit me to observe that they will not be altogether without

their important use. To show what is *wrong*, naturally introduces the ideas, and images of what is *right*. If they are not presented, or suggested, by the sufficiently extended thoughts, or clearness of the writer, they will arise in the mind of the judicious, and reflecting reader.

I should be presumptuous, as an author, and ungrateful, as a scholar, if I did not, on this occasion, mention, with respect, Mr. Wakefield's edition of the Poems of Gray. I know that *he* has been industrious (and his industry is always illuminated with distinguished abilities) to vindicate from gross injustice this illustrious son of his *alma mater*; who, with all her passion for more abstruse, yet most respectable science, has been particularly auspicious to the education of poets;—has produced the greatest poet that ever existed in any age, or nation. But in the large, and exuberant field of liberal criticism, there will always be sufficient room for two, for *any* number of unfettered, and active spirits, to range; without the repulsive shock of a phlegmatick tautology. Such is the various constitution; and therefore such is the various display of the human mind. I

write thus, because I have not in my possession Mr. Wakefield's edition of Gray. The literary thermometer is, here, at its freezing point. The classical treasures, and arrangements of *Rome* extend not to *Tomis*. I read his book, with pleasure, many years ago; but of its contents I have not, at present, a strong recollection. They would have regulated my judgment, and adorned my sentiments. It is impossible for my best feelings not to fling aside every paltry caution (according to their usual ardour) and pay a short, but sincere tribute to the memory of that excellent man. His learning was extensive, and elegant; and it was modelled, and polished by a truly attick taste. The integrity of his heart did honour to the powers of his mind—(how conquerours, and splendid usurpers shrink before him!)—that integrity could not have been corrupted by an offer of the empire of the world! His very faults were glorious; they were the excesses of a mind of unbounded, and intrepid generosity; they resulted from a divine enthusiasm for civil, and religious freedom; for publick, and private virtue. I owe this little tribute to his memory, from gratitude as



well as from justice. Our sentiments on some of the most important subjects were diametrically opposite ; yet we entertained for each other the warmest good wishes ; the warmest mutual esteem. I add, with regret, that from our accidental situations, and connexions in life, there was no personal intercourse between us ; but we interchanged unequivocal, and strong testimonies of the inevitable, and *general* unison of our minds ; from the prevailing strain of our natures, and of our intellectual pursuits. Let political, and ecclesiastical power look down from their artificial heights, and learn christian toleration, and benevolence, from two private men ; whom a disdain of hypocrisy, and of misprision of truth, doomed to walk in the humble vale of life. Accept, thou amiable, and beautiful shade ! this ingenuous, and respectful offering, to thy genius, and thy virtues ! If thy happy, and eternal state admits any sublunary objects to thy view—that a friend bestowed on thy merit that honest eulogy which hireling state-scribblers denied thee, will, in *some* degree, deserve thy approbation. The recollection that I was honoured with the attention, and regard of Gilbert



Wakefield, will always be propitious to every temper of my mind ; it will invigorate my active ; it will console my languid hours.

Dr. Johnson's Life of Gray, like many of the pages which he gives to the other poets, is really destitute of strength, and elegance of composition ; a defect which was partly a consequence of indolence, and declining talents ; and partly of a confidence in his long-established literary character, and fame. But it must be evident to every dispassionate observer, that the whole tenour of his estimate of Gray flowed from that intoxication with which flattery, and applause are apt to shake the firmness of learning, and philosophy. The insults which he threw on Milton were odious ; and they were without foundation ; but they were, comparatively, desultory, and occasional ; and some atonement was made for them by extorted, and high praise : nature, and God compelled what a perverse, and evil spirit reluctantly surrendered. When he sate down to write on Gray, he was determined uniformly to affront excellence which looked him full in the face ; he was determined uniformly to contra-

dict the voice of the *many*; which, on intellectual objects, is, of itself, by no means decisive to sensible, and thinking men: but he was likewise determined, with the same unrelenting pertinacity, to contradict the voice of the learned, and elegant *few*; which, united to the verdict of the many, ascertains, and fixes the high pretensions of the poet; and is prophetick of his immortality. His smiles were those of Cassius; momentary, and invidious; and they were perfectly consistent with this dark, and obstinate uniformity. His parsimonious interspersions of praise were bestowed on passages not supereminently great; or on trifles, which, if the judgement of their authour had been properly respected, would never have been brought to light. He could endure the *flowers* that embellished the crown of Gray, but he sickened at the sight of the *laurels* that overshadowed them.

What could be the powerful, and propelling motives that drove Dr. Johnson to these bold, and unexampled hostilities? He was honest enough to acknowledge that he was envious: probably, then, he still felt the painful, and permanent ef-

fects of cotemporary glory ; probably, like his friend\* Goldsmith, he had not yet recovered from the *coup de soleil* with which he had been struck from Gray's meridian splendour. Perhaps his envy, and hatred might extend to a whole numerous, and illustrious body ; he might envy them their glorious affinity to the first of mortals ; to a Newton, and a Milton ; like an Oxonian, of old, and obsolete loyalty, he might hate them for their manly enthusiasm for William, and the revolution ; while he sighed over the ruins of the Stuart-race, or, with a feverish, and wild ambition, he might aspire to a perfect originality in criticism ; he might aspire to give new laws for poetical composition, which were totally of his own invention ; laws, which were at war with the essence, and genuine ornaments of poetry ; and which, therefore, could only be adopted by the extreme weakness of passive obedience to a despotick master. The *new* poetical reign commenced with the sacrifice of a splendid victim selected from

\* “ Parnell's night-piece on death deserves every praise ; and I should suppose, with very little amendment, might be made to surpass all the night-pieces, and church-yard scenes that have since appeared.”—Goldsmith's Life of Parnell.

the *old*; and *Gray* was immolated at the inauguration of *Johnson*.

I should impartially, and sincerely suppose that nothing less than the combined force of all the sinister, and baleful causes which I have now mentioned, could have impelled our celebrated, but most illiberal critick to such a fastidious, and irrational contempt of the long-established constituents of a divine art, as they were founded in nature. Forgive this long introduction to the main objects to which it leads my way. Let the powerful obstructions which I had to remove (I wish that they may have yielded to my efforts) be my ingenuous, and humble apology. I shall now take as just, and accurate a view as I can, of Mr. Gray's poetry, in the order in which it lies before me; and of the sophistry, quibbles, and indeed, violations of common knowledge, and of common sense, with which it was rudely, but I hope, impotently attacked, by Dr. Johnson.

“Gray's poetry” (says Johnson) “is now to be considered: and I hope not to be looked on as an enemy to his name, if I confess that I contemplate it with less pleasure than his life.”—To



his *life* he has been ungenerous; as I shall, hereafter, show. That mankind, especially in proportion as they are distinguished by superiour abilities, should have an ardent love of fame, is neither immoral, nor absurd. It is implanted in us by nature; or, in other words, by the Deity; and it stimulates to that intellectual cultivation which produces the most ornamental, and sublime sentiments, and habits of thinking, to its possessour, and to the world. The timid, affected, and conscious apology, which faintly varnishes this ominous introduction to gross illiberality, is a poor atonement for the offence. Johnson hath shown himself to be the greatest possible *enemy to the name of Gray*. He hath wantonly (I may add, with propriety) insolently disparaged, and vilified his poetical fame; than which, to a *true* poet, of however modest, and unassuming a nature, nothing can be dearer. We inflexibly persevere in a generous opposition to impotent, and to powerful malice; we endure every hardship; every mortification, to secure its glory. If we, therefore, consider the greatness of the object, and the victory which we gain over ourselves, to

obtain it; must not the man who endeavours to deprive us of it, be deemed a kind of sacrilegious spoiler, by unprejudiced, and feeling minds?

The Ode on Spring; whether we take a view of its vernal imagery; of its instructive, solemn, and impressive morality; or of the easy, and happy art with which its imagery, and morality are blended, is supremely beautiful. There cannot be a finer ode on the subject, in any language.

“It has something poetical;”—“the conclusion is pretty.”—This is a part of Johnson’s supercilious, and ridiculous manner of abusing it.—“The language is too luxuriant.”—This is the censure that he passed on a poetical style, the most accurate, elegant, and glowing that can be imagined. The rose, and the jasmine; the luxury, and delight of a healthy frame, are apt to disgust, and overpower a distempered constitution. His cavilling at *the cultured plain*; *the daisied bank*; and *the honied spring*; is too frivolous, and pedantick for my particular notice. He says that “the thoughts have nothing new;”—that “the morality is natural but too stale.”—Our dictatorial critick

ought to have known, that in the province of the moralist ; nay even in the province of the poet ; it is perhaps impossible to produce thoughts (by thoughts I here mean moral sentiments) absolutely new. Perhaps it was always impossible. Poetry has ever been only the bright, and decorated counterpart of the simpler, and fainter pictures in the human mind. It is the duty, as it is in the power of poetry, to illustrate, and enforce important, and well-known truths, with more vigour, and warmth of sentiment ; with more aptitude, variety, and splendour of imagery, than can be excited, and created, by *common* men. The reader instantaneously feels, and acknowledges the propriety, the beauty, and the grandeur of the picture which is presented to his view ; its objects are perfectly congenial with his own ideas, which are limited to a smaller scale, and to more frugal ornaments. The plainer, and humbler beings meet with joy, the noble strangers ; whom they have long been taught to receive in a moment, as their undoubted friends ; for nature had prepared ; she had planned the charming interview. If the prototypes of this magnificent assemblage

were not interwoven in the soul of man ; how could the immediate admiration ; how could the immediate enthusiasm be produced, which, in sensible, and susceptible minds, true poetry never fails to raise ?

If I recollect aright, I have made more ample observations on this unreasonable novelty, or originality ; which, indeed, is often inconsiderately demanded ; in that part of my Lectures on Pope, where, I hope that I have refuted the unreflecting, and inconclusive irony, in which Dr. Johnson is too apt to indulge himself ; and with which he attempts to ridicule the moral, and religious theory of the Essay on Man ;—which are urged with such poetical strength, and elegance ; with such poetical beauty, and sublimity.

Ode the IId :—on the death of a favourite cat drowned in a tub of gold fishes.

“ The poem on the Cat ” (says our hypercritick) “ was, doubtless, by its author considered as a trifle ; but it is “ not a happy trifle.”—The author of this immortal ode knew that the magick of the poet could turn trifles into *speciosa miracula* ; could “ give to airy nothing “ —a local habitation, and a name.”—Therefore he must have been conscious



that this ode was genuine poetry; and that it was one of his harbingers to fame. It was a *very happy* trifle; and he must have been a *very unhappy* critick who condemned it. To call to remembrance all the trifles which great poets have ennobled, and transmitted to future ages, would be an impertinent, and infinite labour. This ode has all the richness of imagery, and diction; it has that salutary, and pathetick moral sentiment, which characterize the productions of Gray. The picturesque description of the vase, and of the situation, and beauty of the cat; her different progressive attempts to seize the shining objects which tempted her to her destruction; and her neglected imploring cries, give to an attentive, and lively mind, a degree of dramatick interest in the fate of the unfortunate Selima. Domestick animals, indeed, are only despised by cold, and unfeeling souls; but, here, the regard which they gain from heart, and sentiment, is augmented by the inspiring force of poetry. An importance is given to the life of this humble favourite; a dignity to her death; and an old, and trite proverb recovers youth, and strength, and autho-

rity, by a pertinent, and impressive, though humorous application.

Dr. Johnson remarks that in the first stanza, “the azure flowers that blow,”—“show resolutely a rhyme is sometimes *made* when it cannot easily be found.”—a fault, likewise, is, sometimes, indeed, often, by *our* critick, resolutely made, when it cannot easily be found. The mention of the blowing of the flowers enhances the painting; and more strongly impresses on the fancy their luxuriance, and expansion.

*Selima — the Nymph — the Cat*;—are the different appellations that Mr. Gray gives to this little animal which he hath consecrated to fame. The interchange of nymph, and cat incurs the captious disapprobation of our stern critick. If we recurr to the variety, and complexion of Ovidian fable; and to that fair licence in poetry which a generous Longinus would allow, though it is altogether prohibited by a rigorous Johnson; we shall find that these varied terms do not deserve *his* abrupt censure, as “violating “poetical sense, and language;”—with which on the contrary, they are perfectly consonant. I believe that I may venture

to assert, without adopting an unjust severity, that in his treatment of our truly eminent poets, he sometimes violates common sense ; and sometimes, with all his philology, common, but proper language. The poet here observes a very judicious, and characteristick propriety ; which either a critical phlegm could not feel, or an envious jealousy wished to depress. When the colouring, and personifications of poetry were to be presented ; when the watery gods were to be invoked ; when the cruel inattention of the nereids, and dolphins was to be mentioned ; the titles of Selima ; the hapless nymph ; the presumptuous maid, were very apposite, and happy precursors, and concomitants of all this fine poetical imagery. But when he humorously enforced a short moral apostrophe with a familiar, and natural reference to the old remark on a cat's propensity to fish, the domestic, and general name of the animal could only be used with propriety. Poetry is of an elastick, active, and pervading nature. Both gods, and men will allow that it is *her* divine right “ to dart,” and with a momentary rapidity of transition, “ from heaven to earth ; from earth

“to heaven.”—If the literary walk of Johnson is, too often, a measured march in buskins; *that* heavy stateliness is incompatible with *her* gliding ease; with *her* graceful flexibility. I wonder, that, amidst the havock which he is constantly making of Gray’s beautiful machinery, he did not damn these gods of the water to perdition; and leave poor Selima, not only in the *poetical*, but in the *literal* impossibility of being heard.

“The last stanza” (says he) “ends in “no relation to the purpose. If what “glistered had been gold, the cat would “not have gone into the water; and if “she had, would not the less have been “drowned.”—Our prejudices, and passions, make us write as well as act, in diametrical opposition to right reason. I give this remark on the close of the ode, as a piece of absolute nonsense; a characteristick that Johnson frequently, and haughtily misapplies even to the celebrated passages of our great poets. At least, I own that I can make no good sense of the futile observation; whether I endeavour to find its own more independent meaning; or its intended application. It is one of the most leaden of prosaick



bullets ; it flies off from every aim at its object ; and like the rest of the random shot, leaves Gray invulnerable. A homely adage of our ancestors, but useful, and important to prudence, morality, and religion ; and therefore, to our happiness, acquires (as I have already observed) an elegance, and force, from a casual, and slight event ; as that event is adorned, and heightened by the ingenious, but unconstrained, and assimilating art, and address of the poet. Nothing could have found a flaw in this little compact, and harmonious poetical fabrick, but an obstinate, and implacable enmity against distinguished merit. Surely it must now be evident that “ the last stanza ends in a  
 “ great, and essential relation to the main  
 “ purpose.”

I should not so particularly have answered this despicable criticism, had it not been obtruded on the world under the sanction of a great name ; and had I not long been convinced, though unwillingly, and with extreme regret, that with all our natural, and manly love of liberty, we are slavishly prone to an indolent acquiescence in usurped, and excessive power ; to an implicit, and dastardly

obedience to its iniquitous, and oppressive edicts, in the literary, as well as in the political empire. I flatter myself that I have already given to the unprejudiced, free, and distinguishing reader a critical demonstration of the injustice, and absurdity of Dr. Johnson's observations on the poems of Mr. Gray. Therefore, in the prosecution of my defence (of my *vindication*, I hope) of this excellent, and admired poet, it will not be requisite (and it would be tedious, and fatiguing) to follow him uninterruptedly through all his mazes of ill-connected sophistry, and arbitrary assertion. But when I take a view of Gray's longer productions, I shall not omit to examine, and to endeavour to refute our unsparing critick's principal strictures on their principal parts: hence the beauty, or grandeur of the whole structure will be sufficiently seen; and the spirit, and tendency of all the unavailing attacks on its strength, and symmetry will be sufficiently evinced, and exposed.

It is difficult to say whether his ode on a distant prospect of Eton-College is more to be admired for its descriptive excellence; for its animated, and forcible

images ; or for its virtuous, and spirited admonitions ; for the melancholy, but interesting, and salutary strain of its edifying morality. The pure health ; the sparkling vivacity ; the freedom from care ; the joyous days, and balmy nights ; the active, and ardent sports of our early youth ; are here recorded with a lively, and picturesque remembrance ; and they are powerfully, and instructively contrasted with the ungoverned, and baleful passions, which, in our maturer years, are destructive of our virtue ; and consequently, of our happiness ; and which are personified, and painted with an energetic propriety. The contrast is continued, and completed by an equally animated, and afflictive being, which is given by poetry to external human calamities ; and to the infirmities, and distempers of age. [The former evils may my mind, by its intent, and spirited exertions, repell, or defeat ; for the latter, by its dispatch, and fortitude, may it be vigorously prepared.] The conclusion of the poem reminds us of the general sufferings of mortality ; and consequently, of the moderated attachment that we should entertain for the most attractive objects of the present

world. The kindness of Providence to youth, who indulges it with the bright enjoyment of the sunshine of life, unclouded with the prospect of a tumultuous futurity ; makes the last reflexion of the moral and pensive muse.

Unguarded malice, or undistinguishing error, sometimes, when it means to express its contempt, bestows involuntary praise. Johnson observes that “ the prospect of Eton-College suggests nothing to Gray which every beholder does not equally think, and feel.”—In a qualified, and limited, but not in *his* extravagant, and impossible sense, I admit the truth of the proposition. I am glad to know, from our papal chair of critical infallibility, that Mr. Gray, in *this* instance, like himself, and every true poet, in *other* instances, where the scenes of nature, and human feelings are to be described, coincides with the general views, and sentiments of mankind. The prospect, however, of Eton-College would not have suggested, even to a well-cultivated mind, such a variety of interesting thoughts, and expressive images ; so poetical a landscape, and so poetically peopled, as arose in the warm, and fertile



mind of Gray, when he composed his noble poem. "His supplication to Father "Thames" (continues Johnson) [I could at first, hardly believe my sight]—"to "tell him who drives the hoop, or tosses "the ball, is useless, and puerile: Father "Thames had no better means of know-  
 "ing than himself."—I produce *this* icy, chillness, thrown over the heat, and action of poetry, as the feeble dotage of contradiction; as the last, and deepest floundering of critical malignity. Deliberately to refute a quirk of folly, of which a school-boy would have been ashamed; which would not have escaped from the ignorance of a peasant, would be to catch the Siberian frost of the critick. Let rivers, if you please, Dr. Johnson, flow on, in *prose*, in their usual, and unexalted course: let their transparent waters traverse blooming vales, and venerable groves; unconscious of the verdant, and romantick banks which adorn them. But in *verse* they shall still enjoy the higher animation; the superiour attributes, which have ever been given to them by creating poets; by *them* they shall still be deified; they shall contend with heroes; they shall be charmed with

musick ; from the enraged, and foaming Xanthus of Homer, who attempted to overwhelm Achilles ; and who panted under the punishment of Vulcan ; to the mild, and attentive Eurotas of Virgil ; who ordered his laurels to learn the sublime, and the tender strains of Silenus ;— and to the winding Thames of Pope, who commanded his willows to repeat the harmonious elegy of Thyrsis ; after he had heard it with emotion.

As the superficial, bald, and mutilating manner in which our disdainful critick refers to the objects of the poet's invocation to Thames is worthy of the remark with which it is accompanied, I shall quote the elegant passage ; in which a reader of taste will be pleased, to observe that poetical power can give importance, and dignity even to puerile diversions.

Say, father Thames, for thou hast seen  
Full many a sprightly race  
Disporting on *thy* margent green  
The paths of pleasure trace ;  
Who foremost, now, delights to cleave,  
With pliant arm, *thy* glassy wave ?  
The captive linnet which enthrall ?  
What idle progeny succeed,  
To chase the rolling circle's speed ;  
Or urge the flying ball ?

We are told that his epithet, “buxom health,” is not elegant;—and that “he seems not to understand the word.”—A writer, who, practically, at least, had no dislike to coarse, and low expressions, should have been cautious of censuring a want of elegance. None but himself would pronounce the epithet *buxom*, as it is here applied to health, inelegant; or in any way, improper. But “Gray seems not to understand the word.”—To show whether he, or Johnson better understood it, I shall appeal to Johnson himself; his very dictionary condemns him. His second definition of *buxom* is, *gay, lively; brisk*; under which definition Crashaw has, “the buxom morn;”—Milton—“a daughter fair;”—“so buxom, blithe, and debonair.”—And Philips has his—“buxom damsels.” His third definition of the word is—*wanton, jolly*; and this definition is authenticated by Dryden’s “buxom bride of Jove.”—And by his “buxom god of wine.” It must now be evident that *buxom* is a very pertinently, and strongly proper epithet for health; and that Gray was perfectly acquainted with the signification of the

word ; which Johnson had either forgotten, or would not recollect.

“ Gray ” ( continues the Doctor, )  
 “ thought his language more poetical as  
 “ it was more remote from common  
 “ use.” Finding in Dryden, “ honey re-  
 “ dolent of spring ;”—“ an expression  
 “ that reaches the utmost limits of our  
 “ language ; Gray drove it a little more  
 “ beyond common apprehension, by mak-  
 “ ing gales to be *redolent of joy, and*  
 “ *youth.*”—This flimsy sophistry is real-  
 ly sickening to sense ; but it came from  
 Johnson ; therefore I shall answer it as  
 satisfactorily, yet as concisely as I can.  
 To my answer I must premise that Dr.  
 Johnson’s reprehension of an authour for  
 thinking his “ language,” either of poetry,  
 or prose, more “ poetical,” or more elo-  
 quent, “ as it was more remote from  
 “ common use,” or driven beyond com-  
 mon apprehension, was urged by *him*,  
 with a very bad grace. The fault, I own,  
 might, sometimes, be objected to Gray ;  
 but it was a predominant characteristick  
 of Johnson. The writer who was indus-  
 trious to make one part of a sentence  
 commensurate with the other ; to make



it its antithesis, or its reflexion; and who often loaded his periods with scholastick, and heavy words; must have been blind to his own very exceptionable style, when he warmly recommended the attick purity, and ease of Addison: and the great moralist, whose life was deformed with intolerably rough, and rude manners; and often in direct return for hospitality, and kindness; exerted but an incongruous, and inconsistent zeal for the gentle, and humane precepts of our humble, and divine master.

He tells us that Dryden's "honey redolent of spring,"—"reaches the utmost limits of our language." This observation, as far as it is applied to language, is not sense. He should have said that it went as far as a propriety of poetical imagery could go; that it reached the utmost limits of poetical licence. On the contrary; the figures have a natural, and spontaneous affinity; the ideas coincide, without the least constraint; they are congenial with one another. The odour of honey reminds us of spring; need I, then, elaborately to prove, that in the most warrantable force of the poetical style, it is redolent of spring? To

show, therefore, that Gray, with the fairest latitude, as a poet, made his “gales” to be “redolent of joy, and youth,” will be, almost tautology. Pierced with chilling blasts from these northern heaths, I have at once a pleasing, and a melancholy remembrance, that the vernal gales from the heights of Windsor are often impregnated with an aromatick fragrance. As these fragrant gales announce the spring; as they make a charming part of the vernal sweets; surely to the obvious fancy of the poet; to the obvious fancy of the *common* man, they may be *redolent* of spring. And between the healthy, lively, and gay spring, and the joyous youth of man, is there not a most natural, and striking analogy, and similitude? Have they not been felt, and approximated, by the poets of almost every succeeding age? —“O! primavera, giovenhì del anno!” —says the elegant Guarini. If, then, Dryden’s honey redolent of spring, may be easily allowed; I hope that the “gales” of Gray, “redolent of joy, and youth,” are as well supported; and that they are not driven, with the least violence, beyond common apprehension. We might reasonably suppose that Dr. Johnson, from

many of his critiques on our English poets ; but particularly from his remarks on Gray, had drank a Lethe to all his poetical knowledge ; either from the stupefying effects of prejudice, or of more venial age.

The Hymn to Adversity is, in every respect, worthy of its authour. It abounds with his force of instructive, and pathetick sentiment, and of animated, and adventurous fancy. The alarming, and terrifying effects of adversity on vice, and tyranny ; its repulsive influence on the selfish, trifling, and vain idolaters of good fortune ; and its maternal, and salutary discipline on the mind of persevering, and benevolent virtue, are happily distinguished, and described. In this hymn, likewise, Gray's fortunate, and high talent, in forming the persons of his imagination, and invention, is as eminent as in any of his other poems. The conclusion of his invocation to Adversity evinces the humane, and good, as well as the great man ; it is a faithful, and glowing transcript of that amiable christianity which was intimately felt by his heart, and vigorously enforced by his mind.

Between Mr. Gray, and Mr. West, a

most affectionate friendship had long subsisted; a friendship which was formed, and established by a similarity of pursuits as well as of dispositions. It has been remarked, and I believe with justice, that his grief, and permanent regret for the death of that amiable, and accomplished young man, gave a lasting, and insurmountable addition to that philosophical, and fine melancholy, which, always, more or less, makes a part of the constitution of great genius. This tender, and indelible concern; this pathetically eloquent inmate of the mind, which points to Heaven, did honour to the deeply impressible sensibility, and to the thinking powers of Gray. The death of a friend excites, in *common* minds, a merely instinctive, and temporary grief, which is thrown aside sooner than its external emblems. But as the grief of our poet was more deeply, and firmly rooted, it was more productive; it insinuated itself, with accessory, and sublime ideas, into his imagination; it gave a persuasive, a commanding awe; a moral majesty to his muse.

“Of the Ode on Adversity” (says Johnson) “the hint was at first taken from—  
“ ‘O! Diva gratum que regis Antium;’ ”



“but Gray has excelled his original, by  
 “the variety of his sentiments, and by  
 “their moral application. Of this piece,  
 “at once poetical, and rational, I will  
 “not, by slight objections, violate the  
 “dignity.” If, in using the word *slight*,  
 he had any reference to almost all his  
 objections to Mr. Gray’s poetry, the epi-  
 thet was completely applicable. If Gray  
 took the hint for his Hymn to Adversity  
 from Horace’s Ode to Fortune (though  
 I lay very little stress on the supposition)  
 it was merely a hint; and therefore Dr.  
 Johnson is not warranted to mention the  
 one, at large, as the original of the other.  
 Gray raises the spirit of *his* ode with the  
 most important, and interesting moral  
 topicks; Horace encourages the destruc-  
 tive spirit of ambition; the domineering  
 spirit of his country. The ode of the  
*English* eminently excels that of the  
*Roman* poet, both in the dignity of its  
 substance, and in the energy of its man-  
 ner. The ancient poet has his *purpurei*  
*tyranni*; the modern, his *purple tyrants*;  
 by the study of polite literature, we na-  
 turally, we necessarily imbibe the strain  
 of thinking, and the style of our great  
 ancestors; I mean, freely, and generous-

ly; not with a servile, and timorous imitation. When this is not the case, what rich treasures are squandered on dullness, and inattention! Yet to kindred, and fraternal souls, thus born, and thus educated, pedantry, and its almost constant companion, envy, will not allow on just, and fair principles, a mutual similarity of language; a striking congeniality of thought. The scholastick drone subsists by invading the honey of the attick bee.

Dr. Johnson acquires very little credit, either as a man, or a critick, by asserting that the Ode to Adversity is an imitation of the Ode to Fortune; and by bestowing on it very luke-warm, and inadequate praise. He has, however, given less praise to those productions of Mr. Gray which have *equal*, and to those which have *superiour*, and more diversified merit. Tell me, ye spirits, who are free-born, and unsubmitting to every arbitrary yoke; tell me if I am tainted with Johnsonian spleen, if I suspect, and apprehend, that this poor mite of lordly approbation, insignificant as it is, was an artful deception; to veil that pride, and envy, which were eager to depress con-

tiguous, and transcendent merit ; and which were anxious to conciliate a blind confidence in literary dogmas ; whose manner insulted urbanity ; and whose criticism insulted nature ? *Timeo Danaos, vel dona ferentes* ; not only if they are specious, and have a religious mystery ; but even if they are homely, and parsimonious ; and held forth with a reluctant, and aukward hand.

I really think that we may venture to assert, without hyperbolical compliment, that the *progress of poesy* is an ode which has not its superiour in the poetical world. With every generous, and unprejudiced mind, who zealously enters into the powers, and privileges of poetry ; into a complete sense of the pleasure which it affords, and of the dignity which it holds, among the gifts of nature ;—with every mind so trained, and so habituated, this ode must always be a particular, a captivating favourite. It has all the boldness, and fire of Pindar ; with a more connected series of fine, and affecting sense, and sentiment ; with a more characteristick application, and force of those emblematical figures which give this authour a very high rank among

inventive poets. We pass from the comprehensive history of the art to its consoling, and animating morality; to its beneficent effects on the heart, and mind; and to its elegant, and sublime exemplifications in diversified genius; with frequent, and pleasing recurrences; because with distinct, and easy transitions. The original objects; the native description, are interspersed, and blended with their poetical adjuncts; with their metaphors, and similes, in the manner of Pindar; but without the least embarrassment, or confusion. The arrangement of the poem; the selection, and the richness of its imagery; the delicacy, and yet the spirit of its flow, are worthy of Pope; the pomp, and grandeur of its higher machinery are truly Miltonian; with the rapture which he emulates, he once more transports us to the living throne; the “sapphire blaze.” Do not you already lose your patience with any gothick barbarity that would attempt to marr, and disfigure all this excellence? The conclusion of this ode must be peculiarly admired by every one, who, with an ethereal flame, persues, or feels the honour of genius, and of virtue. His profound



deference to Dryden, his great master ; his nobly humble homage to the good ; his independent, and ardent assertion of the infinite superiority of poetical talents to merely nominal greatness, to the play-things of his Walpole ; all these manly sentiments are as generously, and finely conceived as they are happily described, and painted. They equally demand our admiration, and gratitude ; our gratitude for the proper esteem which they inculcate of our best possessions, and consolations ; our admiration of the living pictures of supreme poetical genius ; pictures which are amicable, though opposite ;—which are nearly allied, though contrasted.

It is not without extreme reluctance ; it is not without shivering, and recoiling, that I pass from the luxuriant vales, and Parnassian heights of Gray, to the “ barren rocks, and bleak mountains” of Johnson. I must endure the pain of quoting, and replying to some of the harsh, and incoherent stuff (believe me, the term is not opprobrious) which he throws out against this incomparable poem.—“ My process has now brought “ me” (says he) “ to the wonderful “ wonder of wonders ; the two sister-

“odes ; by which, though either vulgar  
 “ignorance, or common sense, at first  
 “universally rejected them, many have  
 “been since persuaded to think themselves  
 “delighted. I am one of those that are  
 “willing to be pleased ; and therefore  
 “would gladly find the meaning of the  
 “first stanza of the progress of poetry.”  
 —I am sure that Johnson’s admirers  
 ought to have wondered, and been  
 ashamed, at the manner in which he  
 ushers in what he presumed to write  
 against those beauties which he could not  
 see ; or rather which he could not endure.  
 This introduction is more worthy of a  
 Dennis, a Theobald, or a Gildon, than of  
 a strenuous advocate for the most bene-  
 volent morality ; and of a man whom  
 his country has honoured with the chair  
 of respectable criticism. The *process* of  
 Dr. Johnson is of a spurious, and unna-  
 tural chymistry ; which proceeds by no  
 just, and regular analysis ; he puts not  
 the gold of Gray to a fair, and honourable  
 torture ; from which it will always issue  
 with approved purity, and lustre ; but  
 in direct violation of all critical science, he  
 labours to transmute it into the lead of  
 Blackmore, or of Pomfret (two of his

most eminent English poets) with a degenerate, and debasing alchymy.—“ I am “ one of those” says the good-natured Doctor) “ who are willing to be pleased.” If I thought myself authorized by Homer to adopt the military delicacy of *his* heroes, I should apply to *you*, sir, while you are writing in this manner, of Gray, and while at the same time, you profess a disposition to be pleased, some epithets which Achilles bestows on Agamemnon. A greater unwillingness to be pleased ; a more obstinate determination *not* to be pleased, was never more evident (to every unprejudiced reader) in any one than it is in *you* ; in many passages of your critical biography ; but especially in your life of this much injured, and illustrious poet. His two intermediate falsehoods, in this paragraph, in asserting that these odes were at first “ universally rejected” by *any* class of *sensible* readers ; and the insult which he offers to men of learning and taste, who, he tells us, were afterwards, “ *persuaded* to think themselves “ delighted ;” — but who, undoubtedly, met the genius of the poet, with a lively, and unaffected pleasure ;—deserve no particular, and argumentative attention.

The varied, rich, and vigorous opening of the Progress of Poesy is perfectly intelligible, and clear to every one whose soul is susceptible ; moderately informed ; and untainted with spleen. Permit me to retort on his weak objections to a magnificent, and sublime simile, the sentence of contempt which it incurs from *him* ; that they are *nonsense*. He could only have passed this groundless, and rude sentence, from inadvertent, or wilful inattention, to the general nature, and use of similes. Poets, in forming similes, (especially, the ancient poets, whom Johnson idolized) give a wide expansion, and indefinite latitude to fancy. They sport, and loosely wanton with their adscititious images ; they seem to lose sight of the substantial, and main objects which those images were summoned to illustrate. They frequently so far indulge themselves in this pleasing deviation, that in *some* similes, we can find but a very few images, in a great number, which throw a light, and lustre, on the agents, or passions, which they were intended to represent. Nor is it uncommon with eminent, and judicious poets, to interchange the ornament, and the



substance; independently to use a metaphor, or a part of a simile, for their immediate, and literal ideas. Dr. Johnson might have been a master of this critical doctrine (so I presume to call it; for it has been transmitted, and repeated by many superiour judges) from his intimate acquaintance with the old poets; but particularly with Homer; whom he idolized; and in comparison with whom I once heard him say, that all other poets, ancient, and modern, were but *babies*. Greek scholars, of more moderate, and reasonable tempers than Johnson, will pertinaciously maintain the same absurd notion; the same extravagant preference; it certainly betrays a literary infatuation; a scholastick imbecillity.

He tells us that “the second stanza, “exhibiting Mars’ car, and Jove’s eagle, “are unworthy of notice;”—and that “the third stanza sounds big with *Delphi*, and *Egean*, and *Ilissus*, and “*Meander*.” If there ever was an instance of a most disingenuous contraction, and distortion of poetical elegance, and beauty; and of low, spiritless ridicule; it is what I have now quoted. But he exposes *himself*, not Gray, to just ri-

dicule. For what can be more contemptible, and ridiculous, than to deny a poet the apt, and pertinent use of those scenes, and images, of which the greatest poets have availed themselves, in all ages?—" Criticism" (says he) " disdains to chase " a school-boy to his common places."— and should not I disdain to chase the nonsense which madly bespatters capital poetry? I have condescended, however, to persue you through your *new meanders*; they are not *taken* only by *ductile dulness*; but likewise by artfully insidious, or precipitately despairing envy.

" Idalia's velvet green, has something " of cant."—What he means by this favourite word, which he uses lavishly, and promiscuously, Heaven knows; it is one of the ungentlemanlike, and nauseously vulgar expressions, to which the Doctor often descends.

I agree with Dr. Johnson, but not in *his* vague, vulgar, and contemptuous manner, in disapproving " Idalia's velvet " green." — The epithet diminutively shrinks, with the little formality of human manufacture: it debases the simple, and free luxuriance of rural nature. I beg leave to recommend to young poets

a practical recollection of Dr. Johnson's just, and important observation;—that “an epithet or metaphor drawn from nature, ennobles art; an epithet, or metaphor drawn from art degrades nature.” I likewise agree with Dr. Johnson in disapproving the epithet of *many twinkling* feet. The Greek language admits it; but it violates the English idiom. Whether, indeed, we consider the words of this epithet, or their combination, they are equally unfavourable to the poet.

Our noble poet sings, in his liberal, and splendid strains, that in the good days of Greece, the beautiful, and the grand objects of nature contributed to the inspiration of the poet;—

Till the sad Nine, in Greece's evil hour,  
Left their Parnassus, for the Latian plains;  
Alike they scorn the pomp of tyrant power,  
And coward vice that revels in her chains:  
When Latium had *her* lofty spirit lost,  
They sought, Oh! Albion, next, *thy* sea-encircled  
coast!

“His position is, at last, false,” (says the Doctor.)—“In the time of Dante, and Petrarch, from whom we derive our

“ first school of poetry, Italy was over-  
 “ run by “ ‘ tyrant power,’ ” and “ ‘ cow-  
 “ ‘ ard vice ;’ ” nor was our state much  
 “ better, when we first borrowed the  
 “ Italian arts.”

I would almost as willingly allow that the unrivalled poetical genius of England owed the origin of its high cultivation to *Frenchmen* as to Italians. All Mr. Gray’s progress of poetry is historically right. The dispersion of men of talents, and erudition, from Constantinople, and the art of printing, soon conveyed learning over Europe. It would be ungrateful not to acknowledge that some noble Italian families greatly promoted its diffusion : the names of Medici, and of Colonna will be ever dear to the lovers of the muses : yet Chaucer was conversant with the ancient authours in their original languages ; of those authours there were English translations in the time of Shakespeare ; and it is evident, from *his* works, that he had acquired a great deal of useful, and elegant knowledge, independently of Italian aid. The divine Milton was profoundly, and universally learned. His various, and extensive knowledge went far beyond the tinsel of Italy, and



the frippery of France. It will likewise be found, that in proportion as our political, and civil freedom, opened, our minds were enlarged; that poetry shook off the shackles of the tyrant, and took her unlimited, her celestial range. But if Dr. Johnson would have stooped from his imperial heights to the wholesome ground of dispassionate recollection, or inquiry; he would have found, and perhaps to his surprize, and antipathy, that England enjoyed, under the reign of Edward the third, an ambitious, and warlike prince, infinitely more constitutional freedom than under the ignominious, and melancholy auspices of two of *his* royal favourites, the execrable brothers of the Stuart-line; nay, with respect to \* parliamentary freedom, the

\* Mr. Sharp has incontrovertibly; with the clearest, and most complete evidence, proved, that annual parliaments are not only the reasonable, and equitable, but the legal, and established privileges of Englishmen; and that they were continually summoned, and held for many years of the reign of Edward the third.—Sir Edward Coke, in his 4th Inst. p. 9: informs us that “an excellent law was made, Anno 36: Edward III. d. c. 10. which being applied to the writs of parliament, doth, in a few, and effectual words, set down the true subject of a parliament, in these words;—For the maintenance of the said articles, and statutes, and redress of divers mischiefs, and grievances, which daily happen, a parliament shall be holden

source from which all political, and civil purity, and corruption flow, more than we enjoy at the present day.

But as truth is as dear to me as liberty, I must observe, that while we view a most respectable, and philosophical theory, we must not forget incontrovertible, and memorable facts. The moral salubrity of freedom will, undoubtedly, in general be more favourable than any other species of government, to the health, vigour, and achievements of the human mind. But the best authorized ; the most prevailing general rules, will sometimes admit exceptions. Two of the most arbitrary monarchs that ever lived, were the most attentive, and generous patrons of the muses ; who never found a more agree-

“ every year, as another time was ordained by a statute.”—  
 “ Item it is accorded, that a parliament shall be holden, *every year once* ; and more often, if need be.”—Sharp’s Declaration of the People’s Natural Right to a Share in the Legislature : p. 159 : note. In this note the authour justly exposes, and decisively refutes the disingenuous, and slavish evasions, by which the late Sir William Blackstone endeavours to annihilate the plain sense, and invaluable effects of the excellent law by which annual parliaments were enacted. When an unprejudiced, and independent mind reads the honest, learned, and unanswerable treatise of Mr. Sharp, and reflects on the present degenerate state of his country ; he may say, with a virtuous, and melancholy sigh ;—*Fuimus Troes !*

able abode than in *their* dominions. The Roman poetry was at its highest glory in the reign of Augustus ; and the French literature, in that of Louis the fourteenth. For this good fortune of letters, under the zenith of despotism, easy, and evincing reasons might be produced ; and in my introduction to these Lectures, I believe that I have proposed them. I hope, however, that I have said enough to show that Mr. Gray's " position was not false."

" Of the third ternary" (observes our critick) " the first gives a mythological birth of Shakespeare. What is said of that mighty genius is true ; but it is not said happily ; the real effects of this poetical power are put out of sight by the pomp of machinery."—*Not* by the pomp of machinery ; but by that affected blindness that will not see. The pomp of the machinery raises, with a corresponding sympathy, the secluded scenes of nature ; it is distinct, well arranged ; rising in a sublime order ; and beautifully, and forcibly expressive of the future variety, and greatness of the infant genius. To read the stanza with attention, gives us a flagrant instance of Dr. Johnson's injustice to Mr. Gray. He adds—

“where truth is sufficient to fill the  
 “mind, fiction is worse than useless ; the  
 “counterfeit debases the genuine.”  
 This remark might have been applicable  
 to a moral, or metaphysical disquisition;  
 but to apply it to poetry, was the very  
 quintessence of absurdity. — When his  
 mind was in its meridian, how contempt-  
 ible, and ridiculous would *he* have  
 thought the critick who had thrown forth  
 a stricture similar to that with which he  
 here attacks the figurative, and sublime  
 poetry of Gray, on the following noble  
 lines in an excellent prologue written by  
 himself, fifty-five years ago? — In these  
 lines, truth which is “sufficient to fill the  
 “mind,” and to which the same great  
 dramattick genius is evidently entitled, is  
 certainly not “debased,” but exalted,  
 and aggrandized, “by fiction.”

Each change of many-coloured life he drew ;  
 Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new ;  
 Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign ;  
 \* And panting time toiled after him in vain.

\* I could bring more, and striking instances of Dr. Johnson's  
 self-condemnation (though high animation, and imagery, are  
*not* principal characteristicks of *his* muse) from the vigorous,  
 and beautiful summary (in his “Vanity of Human Wishes”) *of*  
 the history, and character of Charles of Sweeden :



We are told that “in all Gray’s odes  
 “there is a kind of cumbrous splendour  
 “that we wish away.” Indiscriminate  
 praise is neither sensible, nor honourable.  
 The poetry of Gray *may*, sometimes,  
 perhaps, with all its excellences, be too  
 elaborate, and injudiciously charged with  
 learned ornaments. But thou literary  
 empirick, (for in thy treatment of Gray,  
 I cannot sincerely call thee a regular  
 physician) “heal thyself.” The fault  
 which he accidentally, and slightly com-  
 mits, is habitual, and prominent in thee.  
 The writings of thy best, and most vigor-  
 ous days, are loaded with that “cumbrous

Peace courts his hand, but spreads her charms in vain.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Stern Famine guards the solitary coast ;

And Winter barricades the realm of frost.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hide, blushing glory, hide Pultowa’s day !

surely, in that admirable description, there was literal “truth  
 “sufficient to fill the mind ;” yet by the poetical persons, or in  
 other words, by the fictions which the poet introduced, *that*  
 truth was so far from being debased, that it was greatly enriched  
 and enforced ; indeed, it would have been, comparatively, un-  
 adorned, and uninteresting, without them. But circumstanti-  
 ally to refute such absurdities, unless the name, and authority  
 of Johnson were in question, would be a work of childish, and  
 tedious supererogation.

“splendour;”—with that gorgeous, and heavy dress, which true taste most devoutly “wishes away.”

We are likewise told that “the car of Dryden has nothing peculiar; it is a car, in which any other rider may be placed.”—This is, again, an instance of unjust, and impotent cavil; of unmeaning petulance. The car of Dryden moved with an accurate succeeding propriety, after “the seraph wings of ecstasy,” on which *Milton* “rode.” The wide field of glory stretched before him; the fiery, and ethereal spirit of his coursers; and their “long-resounding pace;” admirably describe the easy, and ardent flow; the negligent, and impetuous majesty of his numbers. “Bright-eyed Fancy hovering o’er” his lyre, and enriching it with her treasures, most expressively presents to us the modern, and the greater *Timotheus*; completely prepared for the celebration of *Alexander’s Feast*.

I have used my utmost endeavours to vindicate the beauty, and the grandeur of this ode from the captious, and arbitrary injustice of a critick, whose sentence, I fear, has, *yet*, too much authority. If in executing this task, I have shown a warm

resentment against the offender, I hope that my disinterested zeal for illustrious, and injured merit, will be my sufficient apology.

*The Bard* is an ode which is highly poetical, in sentiment, and in figure. It is superiour in vigour, and in ornament, to the most animated odes of Horace. It has all that is legitimately bold, and striking in Pindar, without his wildly abrupt, and rhapsodical transitions. The fire, and invention of the poet are judiciously modelled, and tempered with the art, and symmetry of composition. The whole strain, and pictures of the poem deserve our admiration. The concluding stanza (that part of a poem which should always particularly draw forth the attention, and exertion of the poet) is extremely interesting; not only by its peculiar poetical excellence; but by the series of elegant, and grand objects, which are brought to our lively, and ardent recollection. The moral, and inexhaustible magick of Spenser; the all-subduing muse of Shakespeare; the empress of the heart of man; the unequalled, and heavenly sublime of Milton; the graceful, and powerful negligence of Dryden, which conquers while

it seems to play ; the ethereal spirit, and the captivating harmony of Pope, are predicted, and painted in numbers worthy of the national glory which they anticipate. I am now *obliged* to say something on the outrages on all the just, and universally established laws of criticism, which are committed by Johnson, in his remarks on this ode ; because they are the outrages of *Johnson*.

He, at first, bestows some praise on this poem. But he soon repents of his parsimonious tribute ; and sagaciously observes that “ to copy is less than to invent, and the copy has been unhappily produced at a wrong time. The fiction of Horace [the prophecy of Nereus] was, to the Romans credible ; but its revival disgusts us with apparent, and unconquerable falsehood. *Incredulus odi.*” — Nothing but the blindness of partiality, or the feeblest intellectual weakness can acquiesce in all this nonsense. Algarotti, and he, and other such criticks would persuade us that this ode is an imitation of Horace’s prophecy of Nereus. If Mr. Gray really thought, even superficially of that prophecy, when he intended to write this far superiour



ode, his memory must only have glanced for a moment, at the production of Horace. Nereus prophesies to Paris the destruction of his country, while he sails with Helen to Troy; and the Bard of Gray predicts to Edward the woes that Heaven will send to *him*, and his posterity, for the selfish, and inhuman massacre of his poetical brothers. The subject as well as the strain of the two odes are as different as we can suppose. Nereus prophesied, and the Welsh bard prophesied; this is all the plagiarism, or all the imitation; yet for such resemblance as this; or even for more trivial similarities; a professed critick, from whom you might expect sensible observations; or a dull, and corresponding pedant, who is continually popping up his head in as dull a Magazine, or Review, discovers, with a most pervading penetration, emulations, imitations, and thefts, in some great ancient or modern poet; of which he never dreamed; and which never met a moment of his waking hours. Let me again observe, that if you endeavour to deprive poetry of all its fair, and embellishing licence, you proclaim your ignorance of the art; and you attack its very vitals.

The Romans no more believed the prophecy of Nereus, than the English believe the prophecy of Gray's Welsh Bard ; or the agency of the Sylphs, and Gnomes, in Pope's Rape of the Lock. Let us now judge if " the fiction of Horace was, to " the Romans, credible ;" whether " its " revival disgusts us with apparent, and " unconquerable falsehood ;" and whether the unfortunate existence of poetry is to be reduced to the chronology of states.

One might suppose that Dr. Johnson had totally forgotten the wide range of poetry ; and the rational sense in which its extensive liberties were accepted, both by the ancient, and modern world. Did he insult the powerful, and unbounded fancy of Shakespeare ; did he exclaim against it, — *incredulous odi ?* — Did he show it any disrespect, when he sate, in critical judgement, on the airy dagger of Macbeth ; and on the prophecies of his witches, and of *their* apparitions ? We give not a particle of *absolute* credit to those fictions ; yet we are delighted with them, from the art, and fervour of genius, with which they are presented. Long, since the days of sacred inspira-

tion, a human, but extraordinary foresight of future events has been extensively believed; at least, by popular superstition; nay, the belief of it, in several parts of the world, is not yet extinct. Therefore, on a foundation thus prepared; I may say, thus natural, a poet may very warrantably raise his prophetical superstructure; without violating a sufficient consistency between the boldness of *his* muse, and the habitual, and liberal sentiments of mankind. Our very certainty, as believers in revelation, that prophets *have* existed, makes this poetical use of prophecy, with reasonable men, in some degree, glide more easily into critical approbation. It is very warrantable, and fair for a modern poet, on the free ground, without which *he* could not act, to suppose that the Deity, who formerly denounced, by his prophets, to profane, and barbarous tyrants, a series of their particular punishments, might, in later times, repeat such terrours, on extraordinary occasions. Therefore, with all the probability, and propriety, which a true critick would require, Mr. Gray makes his Bard predict to Edward the woes which were to afflict himself, and

his race, for the murder of those innocent, and virtuous men, who were born to give the world its most impressive instruction, and its noblest entertainment. I hope that it is now evident that Dr. Johnson's disgust against the prophecy of the Bard was by no means the result of a distinguishing judgement, or of a classical taste.

What immediately follows is only a continuation of this critical dotage; of this mad violation of all the rights of poetry. Little could Gray have imagined that in an enlightened age, and by a critick whom England has too superstitiously revered, a privilege, the free, indispensable, and eternal use of which, by his cotemporary, and preceding poets, *he* hath generously praised, would be denied to *him*, — “of dressing truth  
“severe in fairy fiction.”—Little could he have imagined, that this literary Diogenes would have thus contemptuously trampled on the magnificent apparel of our poetical Platos.

“We are improved” (he adds) “only  
“as we find something to be imitated,  
“or declined. I do not see that the *Bard*  
“promotes any truth, moral, or politi-



“cal.” — It is not always the *duty* of poetry to promote truths, either moral, or political. It is to the honour of Gray’s poetry, that, through its general tenour, it promotes both ; and the ode, which, not from its own faults, incurs all this supercilious disdain, clearly, and strongly inculcates political as well as moral truth. It augments our esteem of that divine art which inspires a love of liberty, and virtue ; and it exposes the folly, and madness of that ambition which would secure itself by crimes.

“ His stanzas are too long” (says the critick) “ especially in his epodes ; the “ ode is finished before the ear has learned its measures ; and consequently, before it can receive pleasure from their “ consonance, and recurrence.”—If an untuned ear, and a disgusted mind cannot harmonize with judicious, and charming versification ; well divided, and emphatical ; the *reader*, not the *poet* is to be blamed.

“ Of the first stanza” (continues our critick) “ the abrupt beginning has been “ celebrated. But technical beauties can “ give praise only to the inventor. It “ is in the power of any man to rush ab-

“ ruptly upon his subject that has read  
 “ the poem of Johnny Armstrong — *Is*  
 “ *there ever a man in all Scotland ?* ” — The  
 beginning of the ode has, indeed, been  
 justly celebrated for its very forcible propriety ; for its immediate, and impetuous  
 expression of the grief, and indignation  
 of the Bard. To nature, then, and to the  
 common emotions of the human mind,  
 it owes its origin ; not to deliberate, and  
 ingenious invention. Those emotions  
 may break forth in a similar manner, on  
 an infinite variety of occasions ; therefore  
 this abruptness of exordium, especially as  
 it borrows neither words, nor ideas, may  
 be used by poets, with an unlimited repetition.  
 If this was not a just account of  
 the source, and character of this kind of  
 exordium, it could not have been so often  
 used by *different* poets ; it could not have  
 been so often used by the *same* poet,  
 without a servile, and hackneyed imitation ;  
 which would have deadened, instead of  
 animating, the beginning of many beautiful,  
 and sublime odes. I suppose that Dr. Johnson  
 never thought of despising the “ *Quem virum, aut he-*  
 “ *roa :* ” — the “ *Bacchum in remotis car-*

“mina rupibus;” — or the “Qualem  
 “ministerium fulminis alitem,” of \* Ho-  
 “race. He had as little reason to despise the  
 “Ruin seize thee, ruthless king,” of Gray.  
 And because it is in the power of a poet-  
 aster to imitate, or naturally to seize *one*  
 of the distinguished, yet easy properties  
 of a great poet; should the latter be illi-  
 berally, and invidiously, brought, for  
 a moment, into any degree of competition  
 with the former? Nothing less than the  
 overflowing bile of the jaundiced fiend  
 could have impelled *this* miserable retort,  
 from the ballad of *Johnny Armstrong*.  
 It is again throwing the dirt of the dunces  
 of Pope: it is Dennis; or Welstead;  
 or Oldmixon; *not* what Dr. Johnson  
 ought to have been.

“The initial resemblances, or allitera-  
 “tions, *ruin, ruthless, helm, or hauberk,*  
 “are below the grandeur of a poem that

\* According to the critical inquisition of Dr. Johnson, we may assert that Horace borrowed, or stole (and without acknowledging the theft, like Mr. Gray) the abrupt, yet natural beginning of these odes, from Pindar, and that we may, therefore, despise this long, and justly admired mode of exordium, in the Roman as well as in the English poet; as it is merely “a technical beauty; which can give praise only to the inventor.”



“endeavours at sublimity.” The endeavours of the poet have been completely successful; the ode is extremely sublime; nor can it be dragged down from its heights by the most ponderous critical gravitation. When the lines which contain these obnoxious words are read by unprejudiced candour, and good sense, they will not be charged with affected initial resemblances; with studied alliteration. They flowed on, without embarrassment, or constraint; in the genial stream of the poet’s thought. What a poor pretender to poetry must *he* be, who is afraid to use two words in the same line which begin with the same letter? And to what a diminutive size must that critical mind be shrivelled; to what a suspicion, and jealousy of *letters*; who attributes this casual coincidence to metrical art; to the little *patches* of poetry?

Our critick thus proceeds:—“In the second stanza the Bard is well described; but in the third we have the puerilities of obsolete mythology. When we are told that Cadwallo ‘hushed the stormy main;’ and that Modred ‘made huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud-



“ ‘ topped head ;’ attention recoils from  
 “ the repetition of a tale that even when  
 “ it was first heard, was heard with  
 “ scorn.”

This dramattick heightening, this bold animation of the material objects of nature, will never be scorned but by an austere, and irreconcilable scorner. The mythology, and the practice will never be obsolete, while the world produces true, and fairly adventurous poets. And this vivid, and actuating spirit will always be warrantable ; it will always be agreeable ; it will always give a lively pleasure ; while its objects are not mean ; while they do not excite laughter, and ridicule ; and while, in poetical form, and colour, they are not incompatible, or inconsistent with the principal object. My attention recoils not ; it is more eagerly attracted to the musick, and poetry of the Bard ; while he recites the mighty magick ; the *speciosa miracula*, of the harps of Modred, and Cadwallo.

Some examples from ancient, and great poets, of giving life, and motion to matter ; and of representing future events, by figures which could never be *literally* realized, will be a decisive, and I hope,

an agreeable refutation of Dr. Johnson's objections to the similar liberties of our English poet.

In the sixth eclogue of Virgil, when Silenus begins his song—

Tum vero in numerum Faunos, ferasque videres  
Ludere; tum rigidos motare cacumina quercus.

Horace adorns one of *his* noblest odes with the miraculous effects of the musick, and poetry of Orpheus :—

——vocalem temerè insecutæ

Orphea Silvæ ;

Arte maternâ rapidos morantem

Fluminum lapsus, celeresque ventos ;

Blandum et auritas fidibus canoris

Ducere quercus.

I suppose that Dr. Johnson would not have pleaded, in favour of Horace, and Virgil, that this poetical kind of omnipotence was at all believed by Augustus, or Mæcenas; or by any other friends, and admirers of those immortal poets. Neither *it*, nor the mythology from which it originated, was more credited by *them* than it is by modern Europe. The objects were the productions of a sportive,

and pleasing imagination; they were embellished with elegant, vigorous, and harmonious numbers; and elevated, and dignified by these enchanting aids, from which the *potestas quidlibet audendi* receives its sanction, they afforded amusement; they gave delight to the fancy to which they were addressed.

I am happy to have an opportunity of paying at once my critical respect, and my religious veneration to the sacred writings. The few passages that I shall quote are eminent examples of the pathetick, and exhilarating style of a beautiful hyperbole. — “Thou crownest the  
 “year with thy goodness; and thy clouds  
 “drop fatness. They shall drop upon  
 “the dwellings of the wilderness; and  
 “the little hills shall rejoice on every  
 “side. The folds shall be full of sheep;  
 “the valleys also shall stand so thick  
 “with corn, that they shall laugh, and  
 “sing.” — Psalm LXV, vs. 13th 14th. The muse of the royal poet who was graced with a *pastoral* animation while she walked on earth, assumed a *celestial* animation when she mounted to Heaven. — “Their voices” [the voices of the stars,

and planets] “ are heard among them :  
 “ their sound is gone out into all lands ;  
 “ and their words unto the ends of the  
 “ world. In them hath he set a taberna-  
 “ cle for the sun ; who cometh forth as  
 “ a bridegroom out of his chamber ; and  
 “ rejoiceth as á giant to run his course.”  
 —Psalm XIXth, vs. 4th, 5th. The verse  
 which I shall now transcribe is a part of  
 the prophet Isaiah’s lively, and strong  
 description of the spiritual kingdom of the  
 Messiah. The mild, and amiable virtues  
 which distinguish that kingdom, are, a  
 union of the most separate interests, of  
 the most divided passions, into peace, be-  
 nevolence, and pure and cordial affec-  
 tion. The picture in the page of the  
 prophet is prominent, and engaging ; but  
 it is, as yet, weakly reflected back, by the  
 practice of the world.—“ The wolf shall  
 “ dwell with the lamb ; and the leopard  
 “ shall lie down with the kid ; and the  
 “ calf, and the young lion ; and the fat-  
 “ ling together ; and a little child shall  
 “ lead them.” — Isaiah : c. XIth, v. 6th.  
 If we consider the licence of poetry alone,  
 the critical scorn with which Dr. Johnson  
 treated the prodigious effects of the strains



of Modred, and Cadwallo, would have been applicable, with equal justice, to *these* passages. But from this profane as well as injudicious contempt, he was perfectly secured, by his early prejudices, and partialities ; and what was more to his credit, by his unshaken belief in religion.

The winding-sheet of Edward is next examined by our curious critick. His miserable quibble on the mode of weaving it, and his general censure of Gray's manner of conducting this part of his machinery, are too trifling, and despicable for particular animadversion. Solemnly to observe that " theft is dangerous ;" after owning that Mr. Gray had informed us that he had borrowed the weaving of the web of Edward's destiny from the northern bards, is an ill-timed and preposterous austerity, which may, with equal reason, condemn all avowed imitation ; all new poetical objects, which are either adopted from books, or from the immense page of nature. I could wish, indeed, that the elegant muse of Gray had been satisfied with the genial regions of classical poetry ; and had never deviated into the cold, and dreary land of

Norwegian\* fable, and gothick mythology. Its disgusting imagery was unworthy

\* I could likewise wish that men of true poetical talents might be as little seduced into an undistinguishing admiration, or esteem of *Oriental* as of *Norwegian* poetry. The objects of the two kinds of poetry are very different; but their combination, and exhibition, are equally unnatural, and absurd. Eastern poetry has, of late years, been highly praised, and warmly recommended to our attention, by fashionable, nay, by respectable authority: but the highest authority should not check our impartial inquiries into truth, and nature. A single instance will show the injudicious, and whimsical—I may say, the puerile genius of this poetry. In a hymn to Camdeo, or the God of Love, which is translated by Sir William Jones, the bow of that deity is of sugar-cane, or flowers; the string is of bees; and each of the five arrows with which he is armed, is pointed with an Indian blossom of heating quality. “These allegories” (says Sir William Jones) “are equally new, and beautiful.”—If there was any poetical merit in mere novelty, good criticks might have been pleased with many monsters which they have sensibly rejected. Nor can there be any beauty in poetical fiction, unless the play of imagination is tempered, and regulated by reason, and judgement.—*There must be eternal truth in fiction.* However immense; however unlimited the poet’s field may appear; he must, ever, in that field, keep an attentive eye on the established, and immutable action, of the physical, and moral world. If in his imagery, and description, he pays no regard to the original, and permanent operations of nature; if he is satisfied with the unexamined, and incoherent bursts of fancy; his work will be as much beneath true poetry, as if he should lose all sight of the essential, and general character of man. The sugar-cane, or an arch of flowers, has not strength, and elasticity for a bow; and Indian blossoms, of whatever quality, for the points of arrows, cannot fire, or affect the frame, which they cannot, even with the utmost poetical latitude, be

of *her* powers ; it degraded her dignity. A fastidious delicacy in mental, as in

supposed to pierce ; which they cannot be supposed to *reach* ; for how childish is the supposition that an arrow is to be impelled to flight by the nerveless inaction of a string of bees ; a string which was never yet formed by these animals, nor by man, since the beginning of the world ? To make the properties of the bee operate on the heart of the lover, is a preposterous expedient ; in all amorous poetical fable ; and agreeably to the natural, and literal warfare of the archer, the heart of the lover is to be wounded, not by the string, but by the shaft of the bow. Such unfounded reveries are not “ the fine frenzy of the poet ;” but the insanity of the lunatick. I cannot endure the poet ; the ποιητής ; the man who should be the maker of an imaginary, but fair creation ; yet who delights in absolute, palpable, disgusting impossibilities ; and while he dashes through the licentious range of a disordered fancy, is continually rebelling against the laws, and economy of the first and great CREATOR.

Horace, who was a judicious, and elegant critick, as well as an elegant, and great poet, compares the rhapsodies of such writers with a picture,——

—————cujus, velut ægri somnia, vanæ  
Finguntur species, ut nec pes, nec caput uni  
Reddatur formæ—————

and from these crudities he justly turns away, with disgust :

Quondcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.  
Quanto rectiùs hic qui nîl molitur ineptè,

may, with infinitely more justice be applied to Milton than to Homer. And will the members of the Asiatick Society, after all their Asiatick researches, presume to assert, that any passage in *their* Shaster, or Bhagvat-Geeta ; or in all the produc-



domestick luxury, is sometimes cloyed with its exquisite gratifications; and has

tions of their Sanscreeet language, is equal to the sublimest passages of the divine authour of *Paradise Lost*? But what constitutes the unparalleled sublime of those passages? Not the mere impetuous, and diffusive powers of imagination, and invention; let loose to their own uncontrouled sallies, and extravagances; but the fire, and excursions of those powers, guided, and formed by the commanding, and majestic rule of reason, into compact, and forcible sentiment; into gradual, and progressive elevation; all the parts of which conspire, and cooperate, as it ascends, to accomplish its astonishing grandeur? When in the stupendous magnificence of his poetry, he describes the spear of Satan; to make the object more interesting, and awful, he leaves the substance, the constituent matter of that spear, to be created by the fire, and activity of your own imagination; but by his reference to “the tallest pine hewn in Norwegian Woods,” you are to suppose that it was made of a firm, and solid substance; and that it was not, with oriental inconsistency, an infernal vapour, or meteor; which never could have “supported uneasy steps over the burning marle.” The beautiful, and noble world of true poetry takes all the graces, and dignity of its motion, from its revolving round the indissoluble axis of eternal, and immutable truth.

“Reason, and taste” (says Sir William Jones) “are the grand prerogatives of European minds; while the Asiaticks have soared to loftier heights in the sphere of imagination.”—*Asiatick Researches*, vol. 1st.—Then give *me* the productions of European minds, for *my* attention, and delight. Our eastern critick, here, mistakes mere novelty, and wildness of fancy, for the true sublime. In his translation of the ode to which I have referred, and in his other translations of Indian poetry, he has, I doubt not, done all for the originals that *could* be done; yet these translations are certainly not very interesting, and impressive, to an unprejudiced, and sensible reader. Once more;



recourse to inferiour, and vulgar fare. By this degeneracy of mental perception,

it is reason, judgement, taste, (name the poetical superintendent, and censor as you please,) that forms, and composes, in so natural, connected, and harmonious a manner as to captivate the heart, and strike the soul. It is this watchful superintendent, and censor, who produces the poetry that is written for immortality.

I shall here beg leave to remark again what I have observed in some other part of my Lectures, that a true, and genuine poetical taste is always an inseparable concomitant of true, and great poetical genius; as in other subjects, the greater often necessarily implies the inferiour quality. In such a genius, this taste will, in many instances, be found to be distinguishing, and complete, though he should even live in a barbarous age. For the truth of what I am observing, I appeal to many; to most of the passages in Shakespeare, and in Milton, which are written with equal perspicuity, energy, and beauty.

From this partiality for Indian poetry; and from the indefatigable pains which have been taken to draw it from the darkness in which it had been long involved, we may reasonably infer that there is an infatuation in literature, as in avarice, love, or in any other of our passions.

I have been speaking of the general strain of Asiatick poetry: all general observations admit exceptions. But I do not believe that from all the volumes of Asia so many specimens of the true sublime can be produced as are to be found in *our* holy scriptures.—While I take leave of this interesting subject, let me ask the learned Orientalists; as human life is short, and as poetry, charming as it *is*, should not be its *only* business, why should we ransack the languages; and other arcana of far-distant countries, in search of poetry, when we have it in such abundance, and in such excellence, at home? There is enough of Roman, and of English poetry (the noblest poetry in the world) to instruct, and entertain the hours of serene thought;

Gray's taste in reading as well as in writing, was sometimes extremely corrupted. He admired the Fingal of Macpherson, and spoke with contempt of the Eloisa of Rousseau.

The first stanza of the second division of stanzas thus begins :

Weave the warp, and weave the woof;  
The winding-Sheet of Edward's race;  
*Give ample room, and verge enough*  
The characters of hell to trace.

The third verse Johnson calls "a wretched line." I think that *he* alone could have given it this epithet. It is sufficiently strong for the poet's purpose. Poetry as well as prose, must, or *should* relax, as its objects are weaker; otherwise it infallibly degenerates into bombast. If its diction was always elevated, and highly coloured, we should be justly,

of refined recreation ;—to the most extended longevity. We need not to have any recourse to the inefficient declamation of Germany, nor to the gorgeous, glaring, and unnatural imagery, and hyperboles of India. We miss the complete attainment of elegant, and inestimable knowledge, as often by the excess as by the languour of our pursuit. Our minds are bewildered, and lost, in the mazes of a capricious variety ; or they are oppressed, and buried beneath a heap of words.

and equally disgusted with its sameness, and its impropriety.

To his personification of thirst, and hunger, and to his mode of introducing them, I think that I may venture to assert that no critick but Dr. Johnson would have objected.

“The ode” (he says) “might have been concluded with an action of better example. But suicide is always to be had, without expence of thought.”—If suicide is ever excusable ; if it is ever justifiable ; like the Bard of our poet—“headlong from the mountain’s height ;”—“deep in the roaring tide to plunge to endless night ;”—it is when we terminate our life to avoid a worse death, which we should certainly incur, from the mandate of a tyrant. How could our critick presume to think that it was the intention of the poet to make the suicide of the Bard *exemplary* ? The religious, and superstitious severity of Johnson often counteracted, and for a time, extinguished his humanity. Every breast that is adorned with a sensible, and generous morality ; every breast that is adorned with a properly understood, and genuine christian morality ;

will feel the tenderest compassion, and make the largest allowances, for many cases of suicide ; an unfortunate, and deplorable act, which has been committed by some of the greatest, and best of men.



## LECTURE XX.

### GRAY.

WHEN he dismisses this fatal catastrophe, by remarking that it requires no expence of thought, he shows his own superficiality of thinking. This groundless remark equally charges Addison, Otway, Shakespeare, and many other illustrious poets, with a poverty of thought. A large expence of *glorious* thought has often preceded, while its tenour gradually prepared, and dignified the suicide of its dramattick heroes. But to endeavour to demolish the fame of a great poet by mere dogmatical assertion, or contemptuous insult; by rude, and precipitate attacks, unauthorized by a particle of reason, and argument; or more desperately to promote your endeavour, to attempt, at one crash, profanely to strike to ruins the whole temple of the

muses ; to show all this unmerited contempt ; to commit all this gothick violence, “ requires no expence of thought.”

The following quotation will be an emphatical instance of a very selfish depravity, which is too common to human nature ; a keen perception of the faults of *others* ; and at least an *apparent* insensibility to *our own*.

“ These odes are marked by glittering  
 “ accumulations of ungraceful orna-  
 “ ments ; they strike rather than please ;  
 “ the images are magnified by affecta-  
 “ tion ; the language is laboured into  
 “ harshness. The mind of the writer  
 “ seems to work with unnatural violence.  
 “ *Double, double ; toil, and trouble.*  
 “ He has a kind of strutting dignity ;  
 “ and is tall by walking on tiptoe. His  
 “ art, and his struggle are too visible ;  
 “ and there is too little appearance of  
 “ ease, and nature.”—If Mr. Gray ever  
 affects this elaborate, and swelling dignity, it but seldom injures *his* poetry ; and but in a small degree. But if I wished to give to any one an accurate idea of the ruling features of Johnson’s eloquence, I should copy this faithful, and striking likeness which he has drawn of himself.

Notwithstanding the peremptory, and dictatorial sentence which is here passed on this poet; a sentence which, undoubtedly, many readers have deemed a piece of decisive, and unanswerable criticism; I am still convinced (and I trust that the opinion of many respectable criticks will warrant my conviction) that the poetry of Mr. Gray is, in general, equally eminent for strength, and beauty; that it flows with that ardent, but happily attempered, and well-regulated spirit; and with that harmony of its constituent parts as well as of its versification, which are the charming, and admirable effects of true genius; of a judicious plan, and of a masterly composition.

In a Life of Mr. Gray, which does far more justice to him both as a man, and a poet than has been vouchsafed to him by Dr. Johnson; I find that some superficial, and pedantick pretenders to a taste for poetry, have given almost the same character of the celebrated elegy which our leader in criticism, in the beginning of my last quotation, has applied, in general, to his Poems. “The elegy is thought by “some” (says Dr. Knox, in his Essays)

“ to be no more than a confused heap of  
 “ splendid ideas, thrown together, with-  
 “ out order, and without proportion.”—  
 The ideas of those people who had this  
 opinion of that beautiful elegy, must  
 always have been very *confused*: in esti-  
 mating the merit of the poem, they could  
 not disentangle that confusion, and make  
 those ideas accompany the imagination,  
 and sentiments of the poet, in a collateral  
 order; in short, they could not raise *their*  
 little minds to a height, in some degree,  
 proportionable to the grandeur of the  
 muse. So unjust, and disparaging a cen-  
 sure of a most excellent poem was very  
 consonant with the abilities of weak, and  
 insignificant criticks; nor was it incon-  
 sistent with Dr. Knox’s abilities, when *he*  
 reflected on the stupid opinion, to hesi-  
 tate between assent, and disapprobation;  
 but it was unworthy of Dr. Johnson,  
 who when he was distinguished by the  
*Rambler*; and when its authour was not  
 yet tainted with a pension, nor intoxicated  
 with adulation, wrote some papers of  
 judicious, and elegant criticism; it was  
 unworthy of *his* manly atchievements, to  
 discredit his aged fame; and like a Dr.



Knox, or the witling Kelly \*, to show a contempt of Mr. Gray's best productions.

Dr. Johnson informs us that "his translations of Northern, and Welsh Poetry deserve praise ; the imagery is preserved ; perhaps often improved ; but the language is unlike the language of *other poets*."—Subjects, and their concomitant images, and scenes, injudiciously chosen by the poet, are equal to a privation of half of his natural powers of excellence. I again wish that these northern rhapsodies had for ever been confined to their own bleak, and dismal abodes. They have drawn a dark shade, and hideous figures over the splendid muse of Gray. The mechanical business of weaving ; the texture of human entrails ; and the gasping heads of warriors, for

\* "Some passages" [in the celebrated elegy] "have been censured by Kelly, in the *Babbler* ; and imitations of different authours have been pointed out by other criticks. But these imitations cannot be ascertained ; as there are numberless instances of coincidence of ideas ; so that it is difficult to say, with precision, what *is*, or is *not* a designed, or accidental imitation."—From a Life of Gray.—The censure of Kelly, (who here with a very characteristick, though unintended propriety, terms himself the *Babbler*,) is of as little consequence as the imitations that were detected by his brother-criticks ; but of which the poet never thought.

the weights of the loom, render all this martial havock still more disgusting. He says that in his translations of these Northern Poems, “the language is unlike “the language of other poets.”—With this remark, I suppose, he meant invidiously to qualify the praise which he had given to these sanguinary numbers, with a peculiar absurdity; as they obtained that pittance of encomium which was denied to the beautiful, and sublime productions of Gray. But if we merely, and independently consider the substance of the remark, it is to the credit of the poet; for the greater the genius, his manner, or style, either in prose or poetry, will be the more original, and distinguishedly characteristick of himself; without degenerating into an affectation, and stiffness of language.

I thank God, the elegy written in the country church-yard, has passed through the fiery ordeal of this critical inquisitor, uninjured; and morally, and harmoniously triumphing in all its poetical virtues. But there is a perverseness, even in his praise. Almost every part of this poem is instructively, and pathetically fine: yet though the passage which begins

—“yet even these bones from insult to  
 “protect;”—and to which the Doctor  
 seems to have given his decided prefer-  
 ence; by the rude monumental orna-  
 ments which it presents, is marked with  
 rustick beauty; it is inferiour, in  
 strength of sentiment, as it is in grandeur  
 of objects, to other passages of the elegy.

None of Gray's Poems are so much  
 read; are read with so much attention,  
 and recollection as this elegy. This con-  
 stant, and almost unavoidable preference,  
 is not to be ascribed to its absolute, and  
 unequalled excellence; nor indeed, al-  
 together, to the confined, and undistin-  
 guishing taste of the reader. In the  
 higher powers, and atchievements of  
 poetry, it is certainly inferiour to *the*  
*Bard*, and to *the Progress of Poesy*. But  
 it comes peculiarly home to the most in-  
 teresting affections; to the tender feel-  
 ings; to the analogous, and endeared  
 sentiments of mankind. People of all  
 stations, professions, and attainments,  
 are more deeply impressed; and more  
 frequently, and with a more heart-felt  
 pleasure, converse with those objects  
 which they *love*, than with those which  
 they *admire*.

It has been my literary fortune, because it has been extorted from me by sincerity, to differ extremely from Dr. Johnson, on many subjects; on many principles of criticism; while I have endeavoured to shelter transcendent poetical merit from the blight of envy. Which of us is right in our different estimations of genius, may possibly be ascertained, and decided, even in the present times; but probably, in times more free from personal prejudice; and therefore more just, and generous to honest fame.

The impartial diligence with which I wish to do some justice to my critical task, obliges me, with regret, to say something unfavourable to an elegy which I very much admire. There is a peculiar propriety; there is a literary policy; (if the expression may be allowed) in the writer, who, when he is to close any composition; summons, with a new effort, all his force, and taste, that he may bring his sentiments, and elegance, as it were to a poetical focus; and that he may thus leave, in the mind of the reader, a deep, and delightful impression. In this policy, Mr. Gray, at the end of his elegy, has been deficient, or unsuccessful.



The epitaph, in strength, and eloquence, is inferiour to the rest of the elegy; and it is embarrassed with an abrupt, and ill-placed parenthesis; of which the unconnected introduction, and improper situation, unseasonably retard, and weaken the concluding sense. Pure impartiality, and equity, are favourite objects in *my* moral, and literary theory; I wish to omit no opportunity of making observations that may be of some advantage to young, and ingenuous minds, who may aspire to poetical, or to other literary distinctions. I write for my countrymen, and cotemporaries; notwithstanding all that has passed, and all that shall be repeated, they may vouchsafe to read me, before I die; if they do *not*, let me assure envy, and malice, that I have the consolation of a mind which can skim, in a moment, over *their* perishable enmity, and existence, and dart into futurity. Then, in spite of all that *they* can do, to depress, and damp my ardour, I shall still retain, under the pressure of adversity, and of age, my unwearied diligence; my honest ambition; for they are impelled, and animated, by the irre-

sistible, and therefore, not presumptuous hope, that I write for ages.

His Welsh ode, and fragment, are not encumbered with the horrid machinery with which his Norwegian poetry is deformed; and therefore they afford us poetical pleasure. They did not, however, deserve the exertions of the man who wrote the Progress of Poesy, and the Elegy in the Country-Church-Yard. On his ode for the installation of the Duke of Grafton, I cannot dwell with so much pleasure as on most of his other poems. It is by no means destitute of that lively, and expressive imagination, and of those pleasing, and affecting sentiments, which, whenever he wrote, were at *his* command. To this ode, however, an objection may perhaps, be justly made, which, in some degree, is applicable to the *Bard*; that it has too many illusions to passages in our history, which are remote from common knowledge, and memory; and, therefore, do not strike, and affect, with that immediate impulse, and sympathy, which are the spontaneous, and genuine effects of true poetry. In some parts of it, likewise, it sinks to an elaborate languour.

Flattery ; a degradation of the mind, which, in general, Mr. Gray disdained, is one of its humbling characteristicks. For this imperfection a generous critick will find an apology which redeems it, in gratitude, and the occasion.

The state of the authour's mind when he wrote the *Long Story*, to susceptible, and congenial minds, will account for the wildness, and extravagance of its humour, and its pictures. A poet, who had no very considerable worldly, and vulgar pretensions, was, undoubtedly, extremely pleased with the new attention which his genius had drawn from ladies of high rank, and fortune. This very flattering accident threw him into a kind of rapture which he probably had not before experienced, of playful thoughts, and grotesque ideas, which he lavished on this *long story* ; with more exuberance than judgement ; with more effort than wit : yet it must have been interesting to the self-love, and entertaining to the fancy of the persons to whom it was addressed. It could only have been written by a man of genius ; but I cannot class it with Mr. Gray's happy productions.

I am here likewise obliged to observe

that he entertained a very erroneous partiality for Pindar ; and that his beauties are sometimes disfigured by an affected imitation of the desultory, and licentious poetry of the Grecian bard\*, and of his compounded, and complicated words ; which, though they are agreeable to the genius of the *Greek*, are incongruous with the structure of the *English* language. Our early habits ; and even our venial prejudices, mark, more or less, all the tenour of our lives ; all the variety of our pursuits. Mr. Gray's college-life, though it produced effects in *him*, as it has, in *many*, which did honour to a celebrated university, and to its distinguished disciples ; gave him a scholastick turn of

\* I have lately seen an ingenious, original, and bold example, even in a feeble modern prologue, of that comprehensive Pindarick energy which rather violently presses a variety of ideas, and epithets, into one word. I take the example from an address which was written by Mr. Kemble, and spoken by Mr. Egerton, in the theatre at Stockton.

Ye *pin-head-hearted* heroes, pale, and wan ;  
Know, now, the soldier's occupation's gone.

I am at a loss to determine, whether, in this inimitable couplet, the responsive harmony of the rhyme ; the polite compliment to our military spirit ; or the tremendous, and appalling epithet, is entitled to most praise.



mind, which, in *some* instances, was naturally transfused into his writings. Our faculties are absolutely invigorated; they take easier, and more graceful forms, from some familiarity with the gay tumult of life; from some experience of its dissipation. The stiffness of learning becomes flexible, and polite; its asperities are softened, and lubricated, by habitually, freely, and variously mixing with the world.

I have not given such large quotations from Gray as I have produced from our other great poets, to exemplify their general merit, and their varied excellence. *His* productions, comparatively with *theirs*, are few, and short; by the help of their \* impressive beauties, and of their

\* The Monthly Review for July, 1802, ascribes *elegance*, and *simplicity* to the ode on a distant prospect of Eton-College. Its elegance is indisputable; but ignorance alone of poetical distinctions would make simplicity one of its principal characteristics. Its language is elevated, and richly coloured; and it abounds with imaginary, and created persons. A writer in the same Review, takes notice of some dull remarks of an invisible brother; of one who, with more propriety, and prudence, of signature than of criticism, subscribes himself, *Ignotus*. This man, they tell us, “in his sense of Gray’s general merits, “seems to have adopted Dr. Johnson’s criticisms: but on subjects of this nature” (they add) “diversity of opinions will

moderate extent, they may be easily stored in a memory which is brightened with the colours of the muse; with her “orient hues, unborrowed of the sun.”

I have been for some time employed, and, on the whole, not disagreeably, (for I *felt*, as I wrote) in vindicating the genius, and the fame of an immortal poet, from the edicts of an unjust, and oppressive critical chair. I know that *time* never fails ultimately to distribute to distinguished intellectual desert that ample justice which is often denied to it by its own capricious, and iniquitous age. Therefore, while I dismiss my observations on the justly admired, but much injured works of a favourite authour, I shall cheer-

“always subsist.”—On philosophical subjects of every kind, there will always be many different opinions: but on the rank which Gray holds, in poetical merit;—among unprejudiced, and elegant scholars; among men of true critical taste; there will always be a *complete* agreement. *Here* there can be no hesitation; unless perspicuity puzzles, or authority misleads, the stupidity of such criticks as a monthly reviewer, and his friend, Ignotus.—How long will a great part of a nation, celebrated for intellectual strength, and acquirements, be the dupes of a superficial pedantry;—of its dry, and spiritless criticism; of its pusillanimous trimming; of its gross partiality, and malignant censure!—How long will this publick be dupes to the venal slaves of vanity, and trade: to the unprincipled flatterers of dullness, and assassins of genius!

fully adopt the words of Dr. Johnson himself (and himself he unconsciously reprehended while he wrote them) as an infallible prophecy of the lasting honours which will be payed to the memory of Mr. Gray, and of every other illustrious writer who may suffer an unequal temporary fate.—“ By the common sense of “ readers uncorrupted with literary” [and let me add, with personal, and malignant] “ prejudices ; after all the refinements of “ subtilty, and the dogmatism of learn- “ ing, must be finally decided all claims “ to poetical honours.”

Let the tyrannical, the insolent, and the inhumane, be branded, in the name of virtue ; of neglected, and oppressed genius, with their well-merited posthumous infamy. But let the memory of departed worth, and talents, be protected with a moral, and intellectual zeal ; and let them be adorned with never-fading laurel.

Dr. Johnson informs us that he “ contemplated Gray’s Poetry with less pleasure than his Life.”—To his Life, or that which constituted his social, and moral character, I think that he has been as ungenerous as he was to his writings.

We are told that “ Gray seems to have  
 “ been very little delighted with acade-  
 “ mical gratifications : he liked, at Cam-  
 “ bridge, neither the mode of life, nor the  
 “ fashion of study ; and lived *sullenly* on,  
 “ to the time when his attendance on  
 “ lectures was no longer required.”—If  
 he who reads this passage does not al-  
 ready see clearly, in the biographer, a  
 sullen dislike to the person whose life he  
 writes, he must be more prejudiced in  
 favour of Johnson than prepared proper-  
 ly to esteem Gray. Without doubt he  
 was highly gratified with the leisure which  
 he had to persue his studies, and to pro-  
 pitiate the muses ;—with the happy op-  
 portunities for intellectual improvement  
 which were afforded him by a seat of  
 learning which had but *one* rival in the  
 world ; and by the enjoyment of learned,  
 and select society. There is a delicacy ;  
 a pensiveness ; a melancholy, interwoven  
 with true genius ; especially when that  
 genius is inspired into a delicate bodily  
 constitution ;—which is a very different  
 quality from sullenness. — Sullenness  
 frowns on mankind ; this gentle quality  
 commiserates all their pains ; and with  
 justice, many of their pleasures. A per-



son of this frame, and with these habits, will naturally love retirement; and in the love of retirement, sullenness, I hope, is not naturally included. He was averse, perhaps too averse, from science; from the mathematical studies, for which Cambridge has been long renowned; but every generous mathematician will pardon this dislike, in a mind heated with the flame of poetry, and glowing with the vivid, and various hues of imagination. Youth, high in health, and spirits, and with luxury at its command, will often be too much addicted to dissipation, licentiousness, and noisy mirth. And age, if it is thoroughly acquainted with human nature; and if it throws its impartial reflexions back to its own entrance on life; will rather tenderly regret than severely condemn these irregularities. They were altogether incompatible with Mr. Gray's health, and with the current of his mind; and they frequently, and very disagreeably, and rudely interrupted, and molested, his studies, and his peace. This inconsiderate, and indeed very uncivil, and ungentlemanlike treatment, might, in the mildest, and most amiable disposition, excite vexation,

and resentment ; but even the shade that was drawn over a luminous, and beautiful mind, by offence, and irritation, bore no resemblance to the selfish, morose, and proud sullenness, which brooded in the mind of Johnson when he wrote the Life of Gray.

Where he mentions the poet's travelling with Mr. Walpole, he says that “ they “ *wandered* through France into Italy ; ” an expression which would justly have excited laughter, and contempt, if it had been used by any writer but Dr. Johnson. “ Gray's Letters ” (he adds) “ contain a “ very pleasing account of many parts of “ their journey.”—Then they were written by a man who travelled with plan, and attentive observation ; and not by a careless, and bewildered *wanderer*. Johnson seems every-where industrious to counteract the judgement, and system of Gray, as a writer : he commends those fugitive pieces on which the authour set no value ; and which, he would have wished, had never seen the light : and he treats the poems with contempt which had been long admired by the most respectable judges of literary merit ; and which were ardently, and carefully composed by the

strenuous, and anxious candidate for immortality.

On his rupture with Mr. Walpole he makes the following observation.—“ If  
 “ we look without prejudice on the world,  
 “ we shall find that men whose consci-  
 “ ousness of their own merit sets them  
 “ above the compliance of servility, are  
 “ apt enough, in their association with  
 “ superiours” [he might, perhaps, with-  
 out impropriety, have added, *in fortune*]  
 “ to watch their own dignity, with  
 “ troublesome, and punctilious jealousy ;  
 “ and in the fervour of independence to  
 “ exact that attention which they refuse  
 “ to pay.”—As he thought it proper to  
 make a comment on the quarrel of the two  
 friends ; and as Mr. Walpole had taken  
 the blame of it to himself, I think that it  
 would have been but fair, and liberal to  
 let the censorial weight of the comment  
 press on the superiour fortune, and in-  
 ferious mind. I will not say that his re-  
 mark is *altogether* invidious, and without  
 foundation ; but I will venture to assert,  
 that “ if without prejudice we look on  
 “ the world, we shall find” that external,  
 and accidental power is not satisfied with  
 continuing to usurp from genius the esta-



blished, and ridiculous precedence which has been given to it by that world; but that it often aggravates this usurpation by its own personal presumption, and insolence, in a direct violation of the order of God, and nature. If Mr. Walpole was, in *one* instance, liberal to a poet, surely the critick might, in the same instance, have been equally liberal; who had long been, himself, an authour; and who, as a poet, had written many lines which have an indisputable claim to excellence. Though I must be allowed to think, from my knowledge of mankind, and from *some* knowledge of high life; that though Walpole's concession was, in truth, the effect of conscious arrogance, yet when he made that concession, he meant not that it should be believed; but that it should be accepted by the offended person, and pass with the world, as a fine specimen of the Chesterfield-school; as an ample apology, from fortune to talents, for *any* rudeness; as a charming example of complete *politeness*;—his mean idolaters would say, of *magnanimity*. I must farther observe, that as infirmities, and faults are mixed with the virtues of the best men, it is im-



possible for the most impartial, and candid moral writer, repeatedly, and variously to censure the misconduct of others, without tacitly including his own ; but that an instance cannot easily be produced of one who like Dr. Johnson, so often, and so strongly inveighed against a laboured pomp of diction, and disagreeable, and domineering manners ; while both these properties made a very prominent part of his own character, as an author, and a man.

Nothing can show his inveterate prejudice against Milton more than that slight regard with which he mentions his Latin poetry ; while he speaks with great esteem of the pieces which Gray wrote in that language. But every impartial, and good critick will find that they have no very superiour merit ; but that Milton, as a Latin poet, is a rival of the great Buchanan. And here I must remark the fastidious, and unreflecting taste of those criticks who fancy that it is impossible to write in a new, and interesting manner, in Latin verse, or prose. Is it not as practicable for a man of genius, of the present times, if he makes it an object of his study, and ambition, to form, in

both species of composition, a Latin style, not mechanically imitative, but expressive of the strain of his own mind, as it is to form such a style in a modern language, from an intimate, and familiar acquaintance with its best \* authours? We are authorized by several illustrious examples to answer this question in the affirmative. Polignac, Milton, and Buchanan, give an irrefragable sanction to the affirmation.

Mr. Gray was, at Peter-House, repeatedly, and very much disturbed, by contemptuous, and insolent treatment; which greatly discredited the young men who thus disturbed him.—“This insolence” (says Dr. Johnson) “having endured it awhile, he represented to the governours of the society, among whom, perhaps, he had no friends; and find-

\* It is by an intimate acquaintance with our best authours that every good English writer forms his language, *as a writer*; not by conversation; which, in the best company, is never sufficiently accurate, vigorous, and elegant, for composition. Why might he not, as a writer in *Latin*, gain the same advantage, from a masterly knowledge of the great Roman authours?—I spoke of the formation of *language*: for, I repeat it; the distinguished modification, enforcement, and colouring of language; or what is properly called *style*, is the result of an authour’s natural, and habitual manner of thinking; it is the display of the peculiar process of his own mind.

“ing his complaint little regarded, re-  
 “moved himself to Pembroke-Hall.”—  
 From our knowledge of the history of so-  
 cial life; from the selfish, and cowardly  
 nature of man; a person *may*, certainly,  
 have *few* friends, who deserves to have  
*many*. But I think that it cannot fairly  
 be deemed captious, or splenetick, to in-  
 sist, that the supposition of Mr. Gray’s  
 want of friends has an invidious, and un-  
 generous air; and that it naturally tends  
 to make an inconsiderate reader suspect  
 that there was something in his conduct,  
 and manners, which repelled friendship.  
 But it is evident (not, indeed, from what  
 we learn *immediately* from his biogra-  
 pher,) that he was a virtuous, and amiable  
 man; therefore, if he had no friends  
 among the governours of St. Peter’s Col-  
 lege, the severity of implication which  
 is connected with the fact, should fall on  
 those who withheld, not on *him* who did  
 not *enjoy* the friendship.

I am now writing agreeably to the order  
 in which his Life of Gray proceeds: where  
 he introduces, in that narrative, the two  
 celebrated odes, he tells us that Warbur-  
 ton replied to the stupid charge of obscu-  
 rity which had been brought against them;

that “ they were understood as well as  
 “ the works of Milton, and Shakespeare;”  
 “ which” (adds Dr. Johnson) “ it is the  
 “ fashion to admire.”—Who would deign  
 any answer to a remark which confounds  
 all the possible eternal energy of nature,  
 and of poetry, co-operating on the human  
 mind,—with the temporary, light, and  
 despicable influence of fashion?

In justice to the memory of the poet,  
 I shall here observe, that the anxiety, and  
 pain which he felt for having omitted to  
 give lectures on modern history, of which  
 he was the professour, showed a delicate  
 sense of what he owed to conscience, and  
 to society.

The rough critick allows that “ his  
 “ mind had a large *grasp*.”—Most un-  
 doubtedly it *had*; but I should have  
 wished to express the idea by a metaphor  
 not quite so coarse, and vulgar.—“ He  
 “ was fastidious, and hard to please.”—  
 He never showed those qualities so fla-  
 grantly as they acted in *you*, when you  
 wrote his Life.

The Doctor observes that he had “ a  
 “ notion not very peculiar; that he could  
 “ not write but at certain times; or  
 “ at happy moments; a fantastick fop-



“ pery, to which my kindness for a man  
 “ of learning, and virtue wishes him to  
 “ have been superiour.”—Yet the kindness which you have shown for this man of learning, and virtue, has been a deliberate, and almost unrelenting injustice, to his virtue, and to his *talents*; which deserved more respect than all the learning in the world. To the proposition, however, which immediately follows this profession of kindness, I reply, that in proportion as a man is phlegmatick, and dull; in proportion as he sinks to a mere machine; his gross faculties are at his command; they will act, whenever he chuses, in *their* heavy way. But this voluntary motion cannot be acquired by a fine mental frame, which has every *other* advantage. It is exquisitely, if not “ tremblingly alive all o’er:” a heavy atmosphere will weaken, and depress; a pure sky will animate, and invigorate its exertions. Intruding, and disagreeable ideas will check; more painful objects will break the spell of the poetical \* ma-

\* I have been referring to the natural, and general effects of these disadvantages, discouragements, and mortifications, on a very feeling mind. I know that they have been counteracted, and conquered, by heroick resolution, and a persevering ardour

gick. But when its process is not retarded by *these* oppressive clouds; and rude interruptions; when the natural, and moral world are equally benign; it advances, and is completed with a delightful agitation; with an ethereal rapture of the soul. As I am always gratified when my sentiments on any interesting subject are supported by respectable authority, it gives me pleasure to know that this opinion is very far from being peculiar: and that its reverse could only be pronounced a fantastick foppery, by a hard, and positive disposition; ignorant of the constitution, and powers of the human mind, as they are affected in *this* respect; and particularly of the frame, and action of genius.

I have repeatedly read, and with repeated pleasure, the literary, and moral character which is drawn, of Mr. Gray, by Mr. Temple; and which is inserted in Dr. Johnson's Life of the poet. I passed many happy hours with that gentleman, in my younger years. But I have

to excell. But such rare instances do not invalidate the common force of those effects; much less do they authorize a precipitate love of contradiction to treat them with an arrogant, and dictatorial contempt.

one capital objection to that character; it seems to undervalue the effects, and the fame of poetical genius. “ Perhaps “ it may be said” (observes the good clergyman) “ what signifies so much knowledge, when it produced so little? Is “ it worth taking so much pains, to leave “ no memorial but a few poems ?”—This question, I think, will only be urged by inelegant, and unfeeling souls. The few poems which were published by Mr. Gray did the greatest honour to their author’s mind, and to a studious, and literary life. For the improvement of our best sentiments; for the incitement to our best actions; they are worth a thousand volumes of systematical morality; they are worth a thousand bodies of *technical* divinity. Those gloomy reasoners; those enthusiastick visionaries, *drag* you to a knowledge of your duties; or they rather make you forget that knowledge, in mental slumbers; or disperse it in fantastick dreams. The poet, at once, attacks the source of our generous affections; he seizes your heart; he ravishes you into virtue; and from time to time, by the repetition of his enchanting strains, he keeps up your sublime emotions.



Noble, and pathetick poems, like those of Gray, evidently written to meliorate, and refine our nature ; are the heavenly panaceas of the soul ; the

———certa piacula quæ te

Terpurè lecto poterunt recreare libello.

“ There is no character” (says Mr. Temple, in his moral, and literary picture of Gray) “ without some speck ;  
 “ some imperfection ; and I think the  
 “ greatest defect in *his*, was an affecta-  
 “ tion in delicacy ; or rather effeminacy ;  
 “ and a visible fastidiousness, or con-  
 “ tempt, and disdain of his inferiours in  
 “ science. He also had, in some degree,  
 “ that weakness which disgusted Voltaire  
 “ so much in Mr. Congreve : though he  
 “ seemed to value others chiefly accord-  
 “ ing to the progress they had made in  
 “ knowledge, yet he could not bear to be  
 “ considered merely as a man of letters ;  
 “ and though without birth, or fortune,  
 “ or station, his desire was to be looked  
 “ upon as a private, independent gentle-  
 “ man, who read for his amusement.”

The distinguished, and great genius will always have some painful circum-



stances in his fortune, and some humiliating properties in his constitution, to remind him that he is nearly related to the large family of *common* mortals. What seems more inconsistent ; more incompatible with fine, and exalted talents ; than the false delicacy ; the languid effeminacy, of a vain, and superficial coxcomb ?

Oh ! what a miracle to man is man !

The essential form, and the habitual conduct of the human mind are infinitely diversified. In social intercourse, his evident disdain of his inferiours in learning, and abilities, was *equally* unworthy of the generous current of his soul. When envious, and malignant ignorance, and dullness, publicly affect to despise genius ; when they conspire with adversity to depress it ; they deserve no quarter. When they are civil, and inoffensive : when they are not presumptuous ; it is immoral ; it is cruel, in *any* way to despise them ; to make them painfully sensible of their inability to shine. We ought rather to raise them to a temperate satisfaction in themselves, than sink

them to a mortifying consciousness of their natural disadvantages.

His affected contempt of the literary, and poetical character (for it *must* only have been *affected*) was extremely reprehensible. It was shamefully ungrateful, as well as absurd, and ridiculous, in Congreve, who was indebted to his genius for a profusion of emoluments, of honours, and of fame. Voltaire, in his resentment of that insolence, showed a proper sense of the dignity of literary distinction, and a proper zeal for its glory. “ Evil communication corrupts good manners.” Perhaps Mr. Gray caught the infection of this personal, but little visionary consequence, from his intimacy with Mr. Walpole. But he should have left the presumptuous conceit; the painted dream of vanity, to *him*, and to all other beings, who prefer the delusions of art; the pageantry of human power, before the endowments of nature; before the inspiration of the Almighty. Pride; —that pride which arrogates to itself an imaginary, and supercilious importance, ill becomes the constitutional state of man; a state which, in its nature, is transitory, and afflicted with many pains.

But if *any* gift of Heaven demands an enthusiasm of gratitude to its Divine Donour ; if any gift of Heaven warrants a strong, and ardent consciousness of its inestimable value ; an internal, pure, and pious triumph in our existence ; a triumph too emphatical for expression, and too spiritual for show ;—it is that intellectual force, and fire ; that creative, and diversified expansion of mind, which gives birth to rich, various and interesting thoughts ; and embodies them in congenial forms ;—it is that irresistible, and victorious energy of soul, which conquers all difficulties, and is superiour to all situations ; which opposes to insolence its repelling spring ; to envy its indefatigable perseverance ;—which disengages itself from earth, and asserts its immortality.

## APPENDIX.

To a dispassionate, sensible, and philosophical observer, it is curious, and interesting, to mark the various, and very different natural endowments of the human mind. Some learned, and ingenious men, who, indeed, were eminent writers on subjects to which they were adapted by nature; and with which, by their habitual studies they were well acquainted, have likewise presumed to be criticks on our great poets, without possessing much critical acumen, or discrimination. It is Dr. Adam Smith's opinion, that the poetry of Gray bears a striking resemblance to the sublime of Milton. This observation is just, as far as it relates to some of Gray's noblest passages. The rest of his poetical criticism, which may be found in his theory of moral sentiments, I shall not have the pleasure of mentioning with equal approbation. He is a great admirer of the cold, correct, and tamely elegant Boileau; and of the French tragedy; which is principally composed of little meagre rhymes; and



of the prolix ; bombastick ; frothy declamation of Gallick eloquence. On such a puerile taste, the muse of Shakespeare, pervading the heart of man ; and that of Milton, “ with Heaven’s artillery fraught,” are miserably thrown away. The same gentleman, would make the display of poetical genius, like that of a lady’s court-dress, almost merely an object of fashion. —“ Pope, and Dr. Swift” (says he) “ have, “ each of them, introduced a manner “ different from what was practised before. The quaintness of Butler has “ given place to the plainness of Swift. “ The rambling freedom of Dryden, and “ the correct, but often tedious, and prosaick languour of Addison, are no longer the objects of imitation ; but all long “ verses are now written after the manner of the nervous precision of Pope.” — I will speak to this futility as concisely as I can. The manner of Pope, and Swift were not introduced by those great men whimsically, and as a fashion ; but in consequence of the progressive improvement of our poetry (in which must necessarily be included the improvement of our versification) varied, and heightened, by the internal character of their own geni-

us\*. The feeble quality of *quaintness* (if Dr. Smith *understood* the word) was never more misapplied than it is here to Butler; for what can be more inadequate than the proper definition of *quaintness* (i. e. a little, affected, conceited kind of elegance) to our just ideas of the genius of Butler; to the inventive powers of his imagination; to the bright, and continued scintillations of his wit? To his ludicrous wit his rhymes were characteristically adapted; indeed the working of his mind spontaneously, and congenially produced them; for after all the blunders that have attempted to tear the *manner* from the *matter*, I again repeat it;—style is but embodied thought. Dr. Swift was a very great man; but he was not a very great poet; as he was incapable of

\* I here principally mean improvements in the *art* of poetry; in the elegance, and refinement of language; in the order, congruity, and natural, and judicious connexion of poetical composition; all, indeed, animated with the soul; all assuming a particular character of form, and colour, from the genius of their poet. As to the higher essence of poetry; as to poetical originality, and fire, and the happiest expressions of them; *they* are not confined to *any* age; nor are they accomplished by gradual improvements: they are a species of inspired eloquence: even in barbarous times, their self-taught authour astonishes his uncivilized countrymen with their instantaneous perfection.

Butler's poignancy, he could not have adopted his versification without extreme absurdity; therefore he modelled his poetry by what Dr. Smith (and not, I think, with much propriety of expression) calls his *plainness*; by a chastised\* humour rather than wit; and by simply elegant verse; and not of great force, and elevation.

Dryden was obliged to write hastily; for he wrote for bread. But by your leave, Dr. Smith, *his* is not a *rambling freedom*; it is the freedom of a great, and fervid mind; pouring on in a copious, and shining flood of poetry; glorious even in his faults; majestick even in his negligence. Addison, in his poetical capacity, was very inferiour to the great poet, of whom, in the next place, I shall take a short view; therefore I shall only pay my tribute to his Cato. In that tragedy he hath shown himself to be an excellent, a great poet: all is classical; elegant; with a moral dignity; with a noble grandeur of sentiment; and with

\* I beg leave particularly to observe, that I am here speaking only of the poetry of Swift. Genuine, and masterly wit is a leading characteristick of his prose-writings.

language worthy of the sentiments which it conveys. I should do it great injustice if I compared it with the unnatural, inflated rhetorick of the French drama. "The correct, but tedious, and prosaick languour," Dr. Smith; which you ascribe to Addison, is most pertinently applicable to many of your idols, the French poets. I wish that I could at all redeem the merit of a charming tragedy from our insensibility to true poetry; and from our barbarous passion for gorgeous, and unmeaning theatrical monsters.

If we consider the various, and complete excellences of Pope, we shall be warranted to assert, that few greater poets than *he* have existed. I believe that Dr. Johnson very justly observes, that "he owed much to Dryden, but more to himself."—And is "a nervous precision" to be a *principal*, while it can only be an *inferiour* characteristick of a poet who greatly improved on Dryden; and who gave us a new, and astonishing species of poetry; from the elegance, fertility, and fire of his own genius? Take your nervous precision to yourself, Dr. Smith (your theory of moral sentiments is in much want of it) but let it not, for



a moment, be obtruded on my attention, while I admire his divine genius;—equally elegant and inventive in “the Rape of the *Locke* ;”—or while I am enchanted with the pictures, and irresistibly borne along with the flame of his *Eloisa*. You tell us that all long verses are now written after the manner of *his* nervous precision. The verses which are *now* written in our common, or epick measure have not even the secondary, or subservient merit of *his nervous precision*. Their authours cannot disguise them in the subordinate graces of that great man. I am always ready to sacrifice a servile complaisance, to *truth*. To prove what I assert, let me appeal to unprejudiced, well-informed, and judicious criticks: let *them* support, and honour me with their opinion of our weak, and childish prologues; or of our larger productions; which, though perhaps they are more highly esteemed, are only more evident proofs of our poetical insignificance.

Mr. *Hume's* critical taste in poetry; the judgement with which *he* bestows the highest rank in poetry, shall now engage my attention. This great man; great, as a metaphysician, and a scepti-

cal philosopher ; was warmly admired by Dr. Smith ; and he was, in many respects, worthy of esteem as well as admiration. We have an observation of this gentleman (if I recollect aright, it is in his essay \* on simplicity, and refinement in writing) to this effect ; that “ there is nothing new, or striking in “ the thoughts of our best poets, if we “ divest them of their style ; of the happy choice, and arrangement of words “ in which they are presented.”—Then there is not a great poet in the world. Mr. Hume here falls into a common error ; that of considering the style rather distinctly, and separately from the intellectual substance with which it is indissolubly connected ; which gave it its being, form, and force. The style is always exactly congenial with the strength, and manner of thinking of its authour.

\* I now quote literally from Mr. Hume’s book.—“ We may “ observe that those compositions which we read the oftenest, “ and which every man of taste has got by heart, have the recommendation of simplicity ; and have nothing surprizing in “ the thought, when divested of that elegance of expression, and “ harmony of numbers with which it is clothed.” \* \* \* \* \* “ Each line ; each word in Catullus has its merit ; and I am “ never tired of the perusal of him : but Parnell, after the “ fiftieth reading, is as fresh as at the first.”—Essay on Simplicity, and Refinement in Writing.

Of *these* properties language is the accurately responsive organ ; or rather it is the completion ; the perfection of their energies. Shenstone was simple, and easy ; because his soul was natural, and flowing ; but with little strength : Pope was elegant ; harmonious ; pathetick, and sublime ; because all these archetypes, or original qualities were in the essence of *his* accomplished mind. To the other *beautiful* qualities in Pope, there was united in *Milton*, the *astonishing* sublime ; the sublime, in all its magnificence, and grandeur ;—because *his* muse was predestined to describe the chariot of the Messiah ; to launch the thunder of the Almighty.

Surely, then, mere style, or language, never was, as it never could, naturally, it never could, *possibly* be praised, by well-informed readers ; by *them*, the poet's manner of expressing his ideas is admired, only as the vigorous, and splendid nature of those ideas give it a dignity, and lustre. A style deserves no commendation which is not impregnated with the spirit of genius ; if it is not actuated, and burnished with *that* spirit, it must always be feeble, and lifeless, like its

weak, and presumptuous authour. Infinitely various are the powers, and display of the human mind: sometimes a nervous, nay, a great writer, in his ardent intellectual progress, will be negligent of the style, or manner in which he expresses his thoughts; but still, aided by that ardour, even his negligent strokes will *hit* you; even in his roughness you will feel an interest. This is another proof, if another proof was wanting, that it is thought which gives a commanding character, and authority to style; and that style will attract, and fix, and gratify our attention; even when it is thrown out by a careless vigour. Amid the infinite variety of human faculties, and exertions, to which I have alluded, there are poets who deserve our esteem, and love, and moderate admiration, in whom we find more elegance, and brilliancy of language, than strength, and splendour of thought. Inadequate judges in the fine arts; inferiour criticks of the Gallick race; are apt to prefer this terse, and secondary excellence; these neat, and spruce dwarfs of Parnassus, to the muscular roughness; to the Herculean, and all-subduing force of our giants in poetry.



To this injudicious, and unaspiring preference there is an opposite analogy (here, again, I must beg leave to have my eye on France) in that puerile, and foppish taste which prefers the company, and conversation of a coxcomb, in a gay and fashionable dress, to the society of a man of great good sense, and virtue, in homely, and negligent apparel. Our truly *great* poets, however, have united, in *their* productions, every degree, and species of poetical excellence.

In the opinion of Mr. Hume, and in accurate consistency with *his* poetical theory, Catullus, and Parnell were the first of all poets. They, indeed, are two of the poets who are far more distinguished by an elegant, and happy turn, or manner of expression, than by strength, and variety of sentiment. This beauty of style, however; this *curiosa felicitas*, was, in truth, a part; for it was the bright surface of the luminous, and equable current; or it was the immediate, and plastick result of the more calm, and regular graces of the mind.

“Each line, each word” (says Mr. Hume) “in Catullus, has its merit; but “Parnell, after the fiftieth reading, is as

“ fresh as at the first.”—This is certainly, in a proportionable estimate of poetical excellence, a very exaggerated encomium on these two poets: it is exaggerated, with regard to the abated effect which even intellectual pleasure, often repeated, produces in the mind. But if it is deserved by *any* poets, it is certainly deserved by those poets who have traversed an extensive, and variegated field; and who are extremely interesting, from a diversity of genius as well as of subjects;—who have raised the elegant, and the beautiful, to the vigorous, and the sublime; and who, therefore, give us, not only a sedate, and easy, but a highly impassioned pleasure; the agitation of delight; the enthusiasm of rapture. These effects may be produced by the poetry of Thomson; of Pope; of Young, and of *Milton*; but they are beyond the power of Catullus, and Parnell; who have no great variety; who are not eminently distinguished by strength, and elevation; and whose excellence lies not so much in the *essence* as in the *manner*. Indeed I have often wondered that a man of Mr. Hume’s moral decorum should have chosen Catullus for an object of his particular

praise ; as the muse of that poet is, in general, prostituted to a horrid obscenity.

The same gentleman, in a letter to the late Dr. Robertson, mentions our justly celebrated Swift ; — “ whom” (says he) “ I can often laugh with ; whose style I “ can even approve ; but surely can never “ admire. Were not their literature” [that of the English] “ still in a somewhat “ barbarous state, *that* authour’s place “ would not be so high among their class- “ icks.”—The style of Swift is, on the whole, chaste, elegant, and attick ; simple, and not so animated, and metaphorical as I could wish ; yet clearly, and strongly expressive of his ideas. That he can make us laugh, is his least praise ; he gives us the most important moral, political, and religious instruction ; enforced with a moderately adorned, yet commanding, and victorious eloquence ; and with the powerful auxiliaries of a fertile imagination ; of an original invention. The literary judgement, and taste of the reader who does not see, and feel these excellences, “ must be still in a “ somewhat barbarous state.” Our English literature, in the days of Swift, was in the complete reverse of a barbarous



state ; it was in its Augustan period. From the new, conceited, and vulgar phrases ; from the laboured, and affected strain which it hath assumed, since *that* auspicious time ; we have reason to apprehend, if not already to pronounce, its barbarous degeneracy.

If my preceding observations are just, we may infer that metaphysical criticks miss their aim as much as metaphysical poets. And it will be evident, I hope, that in what I have said of Mr. Hume, I have meant no disrespect to the literature, and philosophy of Scotland. If Swift was not admired by Mr. Hume, he is, undoubtedly, admired by many northern men of learning, and taste. From the letter of Dr. Robertson, to which I have referred, it appears that he was a favourite of that celebrated writer ; and *his* authority alone will, at least balance that of Mr. Hume ; whom I never can deem an able critick on poetry. As a historian, I think that he is eminently the first in the English language. I esteem, I admire his philosophical, and argumentative talents ; though on some important, and sacred subjects, which are eternally dear to the heart, and mind



of man, I trust that he is mistaken. For freedom of rational disquisition, I shall ever be a sincere, and strenuous advocate: I am always as charmed when I contemplate the amiable image of a tolerant, benevolent, and christian *clergyman*, as I am disgusted when I recollect the little creature that is meant by its representative monosyllable of severe secular application;—*priest*.

I have, at length, brought to a conclusion my Lectures on our great English Poets; a work which I have now prosecuted for several years; for since I began it, I have suffered many painful interruptions. If, after conquering the oppositions of malice, which have always been hostile to the literary fortune of its author, it should make its way, as I wish, and be honoured with the approbation, and esteem of the learned, and the good; I shall think myself amply rewarded for my trouble in composing it; for all the troubles of my life. I hope that I have not passed the hours even of my old age improperly, while I renewed my acquaintance with poetry; if we converse with it merely as a relaxation, we are innocently, and elegantly amused; if we give it our

more serious, and studious attention, we shall find it a powerful incentive to virtue.

Consistently with my plan, and with my sincerity, it was necessary for me, however disagreeable the task *was*, and however invidious it might appear; on many occasions, directly to oppose a celebrated writer; in whose biographical criticism I found much to commend; and I am sorry to add, more to blame. And I am satisfied by my impartiality, and by the conviction which results from common penetration; that if great parts of Dr. Johnson's Lives of the English Poets had not been recommended by the imperious authority of a name; they would only have excited a momentary resentment; and been dismissed from farther attention, with a calm, and decisive contempt.

THE END.









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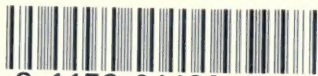
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